ROGUES of the BIBLE

by
JAMES
BLACK

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Rogues of the Bible

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ROGUES OF THE BIBLE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE DILEMMAS OF JESUS
THE MYSTERY OF PREACHING

ROGUES OF THE BIBLE

by

JAMES BLACK

Minister of
St George's West
Edinburgh

1930

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FIRST EDITION

A-E

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Sunny Australia, and especially to Melbourne and "Scots Church" in that noble city. I do this in gratitude for a very happy visit in 1928, and in memory of many charming friendships. Some of these studies were preached in "Scots Church": and one was specially prepared at the request of a friend in Geelong.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a plea for a revaluation, long overdue, of some of the outstanding characters of the Bible who have been immemorially criticised or condemned. I threw out the suggestion of this series in my book, *The Mystery of Preaching,* in the hope that someone, better fitted than I am, might take it up. But as no one has "lifted" the idea, I have been bold enough to take the business in hand myself.

I hope that my readers may admit that I have tried to build my case for each person fully on the facts narrated in Biblical history. I have endeavoured, as honestly as possible, to avoid any suggestion of personal bias or special pleading. There must, of course, be some kind of "special pleading" where one is arguing a case for the defence; but I trust that the type of pleading in this book is justifiable, as I ask only for a fair consideration of the implications of the known facts.

I believe that many of our ideas of historical characters, especially Biblical characters, have come to us at second-hand. Indeed, not a few of our popular judgments have been accepted unthinkingly, as an heirloom from a more prejudiced and less historical age. What I ask in these essays is an open mind to re-examine "the case for the defence."

In view of the obvious reprisal of some alarmed critic—that in certain instances I may seem to have acquitted a sinner by criticising a saint—let us remember that in a case where two or more persons clash, the worth of the evidence of *all parties* should be considered, apart from bias and presupposition. It does not do to say that a man like Elisha, David, Peter, or Paul must always be right, and their opponents always wrong. I ask the unprejudiced reader to decide in his own mind whether I have treated any of these great men with historical unfairness.

In regard to the title of my book, I should like to say that I do not use the term *rogue* in our common sense of rascal or miscreant. Few of the people I discuss are rogues in that meaning of the term. I use the word rather as a modern gardener employs it to describe *outré* specimens among his flowers. With him, a "rogue" is a flower out of place and out of colour among his choice seedlings. Some of the rogues among my sweet peas, for instance, are excellent flowers in themselves; but if they are not true to the colour of my named groups, they are "rogues" nonetheless!

Lest comment should be made on the notable absence of *Judas* from my gallery, may I say that I have omitted him only because I have already published a study of his character in my last book, *The Dilemmas of Jesus*.

I wish to acknowledge the help of many friends in the preparation of these essays, but especially of my friend, Mrs Donald Jack, for her kindness in typing this book, as well as my previous books. When I think of her labours in deciphering my penmanship, which often defies my own conjectures, I am filled with gratitude and amazement.

EDINBURGH, 1929.

ROGUES OF THE BIBLE

AN APOLOGY FOR CAIN

WAS Cain, as I read recently, "the corrupt father of all vice and murder?" Had he a vicious soul? Was he "criminally-minded?" In a word, was he a *bad man?*

I

His sin has made Cain the horror of all generations, as the prototype of crime itself. His name is now a byword for those brutal deeds of passion that curse our social life. It is the hall-mark of every stealthy thing that stabs in the dark, poisons for profit, or strangles from fear or venom. Every literature has its equivalent of the phrase, "the brand of Cain."

I am not dealing with Cain's sin but with Cain the man. I have no wish—indeed there is no need—to speak of the crime itself. What can one add more damning than that haunting verse of Scripture, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground"?

If I do not speak of the deed, it is not because I am indifferent to it, or would excuse it, or condemn it less than others. But I cannot help thinking that there is a possible way of considering a man apart from his acts, although in our human limitation we are forced to judge him by them. It may be as true to say that a man is better than his acts. In any case, our life and character cannot be judged by one deed, however desperate. It is certainly not Divine justice, though it may be human, to estimate our whole life in the light of a single tragic fall. God did not judge David by his one moral crash, but by the volume of his life. Unfortunately, we never picture Cain except with blood on his hands!

When a man is down, it is easy to kick him where he lies. Cain has been so much of a world's abhorrence that there has been nothing too bitter or wounding to throw at his head. Without any question, the generations have been right in their loathing of his sin. As told in these narratives, it was the first act of passion, a passion that flared out into unleashed anger, and eventually found its outlet in his brother's blood. Since then, that stain in the sand has been the mark of murder—"the brand of Cain"—the foul thing that slays, and must itself be slain.

It goes without saying, however, that in apologising for a man, one need not apologise for his crime. It is recognised in our modern theories that there may be extenuating circumstances in our life, which if they do not excuse, may at least explain. In my remarks, following the records of Genesis, I should like to see if there are any suggestions given in the story which may make Cain's deed more understandable, less of the senseless, unprovoked piece of brutality it seems, and the man himself less of a blind enigma of iniquity.

II

The first point usually stressed in a modern court of justice is the question of *motive* or *cause*.

Fortunately for our guidance, the motive behind this deed of passion is fully known. The two brothers, Cain the elder and Abel the younger, brought offerings for Jehovah's altar from their own appropriate line of work. Cain, being a tiller of the ground, brought the fruits of the field; Abel, being a keeper of sheep, brought the firstlings of his flock.

This difference in the substance or nature of the gifts counts for nothing. In the minds of later Jews, it did count, from theological reasons, because of the presence of spilled blood in Abel's offering. But ideally, the offering of both men was perfect. Each gave of his best, the natural produce of his labour, which is always a man's finest gift, to God or anyone else.

It is foolish of us to follow later Jewish thought in stressing the supposed difference in the *quality* of the gifts. To do so makes the choice between the two men only an intellectual riddle. The comments of a critic like Bishop Wordsworth, representative of so many more, seem only confusion confounded to me. "There is therefore," he says, "good reason to suppose that in Abel's case it was the nature of the offering itself, as well as the temper of the offerer, which commended him to God. Abel's offering was a sin-offering, Cain's was a thank-offering. But God in His Law puts sin-offerings first; and there is no acceptance of thank-offerings previous to sin-offerings. In the victim offered by Abel there was an express confession of *sin,* and there was an acknowledgment that sin required the shedding of blood for its remission; and so Abel's offering was an act of *repentance.*"

This type of interpretation is quite unreliable, for it reads into the early narratives the mature ideas of later priestly thought. If the reason for Cain's rejection is evident to the Bishop, it was certainly not evident to the man himself! In any case, how can we arrive at the groundless distinction that the one offering was a sin-offering, and the other a thank-offering? This is exegetical fooling. Besides, there was no *"Law of God"* in these dim days to "put sin-offerings first!"

The Epistle to the Hebrews, in its great argument for faith, quotes our case as follows: "By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain." That sentence, it should be noted, reckons each offering as *sacrifice,* but considers one more acceptable than the other, the reason being *faith,* or the heart of the offerer. We may admit, therefore, that the inward state of Abel's mind was more perfect (shall we say, more religious?) than Cain's. On the other hand, Dr Dods certainly oversteps the line of fair comment in regarding Cain, already, as an evil man! "The reason of the rejection of his offering was his own evil condition of heart. *If thou doest well, shalt not thou also be accepted?*—implying that he was not accepted because he was not doing well. His offering was a mere form: he complied with the fashion of his family: but in spirit he was alienated from God, cherishing thoughts which the rejection of his offering brings to a head."

This criticism, unfortunately, is based on a wrong exegesis of the text which Dr Dods quotes! By a true translation, the verse in Genesis reads thus: "Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shall not it (thy countenance) be lifted up? and if thou doest not well, sin croucheth at the door." While there is the suggestion that Abel's faith is richer and more receptive, there is no implication in the passage that his brother was refused because he had not done well in the past, or because of "his own evil condition of heart." If we say this, we put a damning positive where there is only an indefinite comparative. The Bible does not hint that Cain was *evil,* but that he was only *less acceptable* than Abel. To assert that his offering was "a mere form," that he only "complied with the fashion of the family," and that "in spirit he was alienated from God" is the worst form of arguing—arguing a case.

In the story we read simply that the sacrifice of Abel the younger was accepted, while the offering of Cain was refused. For this apparent partiality, not even a dim hint of a reason is suggested in the narrative itself, although most people rightly agree with the "Epistle to the Hebrews" that it was the *heart* behind the gift that counted, the heart that God alone can try. His own subsequent conduct is perhaps the best proof that Cain's heart at this time, while not *evil,* was not as it should be.

But what concerns us at the moment is the simple fact of the rejection. I think we should observe what that rejection seemed to imply. According to Semitic ideas, it meant that God had passed Cain by in favour of the younger brother. He had thus been deprived of the special spiritual privileges that belonged naturally to the elder brother. With this loss went the choice of him and his line for succession in God's purposes. Apparently, Cain was here dispossessed of what was specially prized in Semitic thought, his "spiritual birthright," a leadership that carried with it certain definite privileges, political, judicial, and religious. He was not dispossessed by man, (the Hebrews would not have considered that possible), but by an inscrutable Divine election. If this is so, (it is the common Hebrew explanation of

Cain's rejection), then we can understand the cause of his anger and passion. We often scourge Esau in our thoughts for so lightly regarding this same birthright, and being willing, seriously or in jest, to part with it for a mess of red pottage and to stay a casual hunger. That is a charge at least that no one can level against Cain. He prized it too much.

Not for one moment does this consideration of Cain's motive lessen the crime and horror of murder. It does allow us, however, to estimate what Semitic thought considered to be the "provocation" that soured his heart. It saves us from writing down his brutal act as only an irrational spasm of groundless jealousy. In his own puzzled eyes, he had suffered a definite wrong, a wrong, too, for which he could see no adequate cause.

His fault lay not in feeling the wrong, which anyone might have felt in his place, but in his method of righting the wrong. Nothing can ever excuse murder; but such feelings of amazed injury as must have lodged in Cain's mind may at least make his anger understandable.

III

Passing from the motive of this grim story, I should like now to ask if we are given any indications of this man's nature and qualities which may lead us to understand him better and regard him as less of a senseless puzzle.

In the first place, he is constantly portrayed to us as a man of amazing vitality and energy, one even with a touch of genius and directive originality, the type of person indeed who with great inherent powers may either touch heaven or sink to hell. I shall bring clear proof of this contention later in my essay. Meanwhile I ask you to notice that the record puts this fact in a dramatic phrase when it asserts that "*sin was crouching at his door.*" This is a word-parable that at once suggests temptation, like a wolf sitting on its haunches, watching its victim for a chance unwary moment.

Quite obviously, this is a picture describing a man of vigorous passions and temptations, who must ever be alert against his own hot desires, and whose turbulent emotions are his worst enemy. This type of man, with his rough powers and passions, must guard himself carefully, for by the very wealth and surge of his own nature, sin is crouching at his door. Here, then, is the Bible's picture of Cain—a big bundle of unruly emotions and tangled powers, with immense possibilities and equal dangers, a heaving volcano of force and fire with no protective crust of solid earth to prevent eruption.

It is easy for some people to control desire and walk straight. In their case, virtue is often a question of a placid temperament and a colourless nature. It is their gain that they are untempted and untorn as more vigorous people are. There are many of us so bloodless and so lustreless that we have not even the longing to break bounds! I am not striving to score a dialectic point, but I am speaking glancingly on a big truth. Our good is to be judged not only by what we do or refrain from doing, but often by the unguessed forces that are resisted. No one would compare the morals of a sickly child and a rousing, stirring boy. That boy with his jumping thoughts will blunder more in one day than an anæmic child will do in a year. It is worth noticing, therefore, for our judgment of conduct, that it is where there is a rush of rude vigour and vitality that sin "croucheth at the door."

Cain was such a man. His explosive power, like a bomb, was enormous. The problem for such men is to use this explosive power when and where needed, at the right time and for good ends. A bomb is a magnificent thing among the entrenchments of the enemy: it is a disaster among one's friends. The real difference between Cain and Abel was not a difference between placid goodness and vicious evil. It consisted rather in this—that Abel had no powder, and Cain had plenty, though he misused it ruinously. Along this line, so far as the records are concerned, lies any understanding of the problem of Cain—not as a man essentially evil and vicious, but as a big untutored soul of undefined power and possibility, who might live greatly or sin deeply.

IV

From the records themselves, let me now adduce our proofs of his amazing vitality and originality.

First of all, we are told that he was a tiller of the ground, and Abel a keeper of sheep. It is a remarkable fact in history that the evolution and refinement of civilisation have come from the tillers of the soil. The pastoral peoples of the world have made little progress. They live to-day much as they lived in Abraham's time, *static:* for the conditions of their life are unchangingly meagre and simple. Cain was a tiller of the soil, because, like all agriculturists, he had the energy and vision to foresee and plan results. He found an outlet for that energy in constructive work. From this work, his offering to God was the "fruits of the field." Thus in its own way, the Bible represents the great science of agriculture, round which so much of the world's progress gathers, as beginning in such a man's first rude scratching of the ground. By his very occupation, therefore, Cain had greater possibilities than Abel.

Further, (how beautifully impartial the Bible is), we read that this despised murderer was the first man to "build a city." No doubt, this meant little more than a few rough huts, with a wattle hedge around them, to scare off intruders and prowling beasts. But in simple expedients like these lie the origins of all social growth and government. There could be no local or general culture without that first rude stockade and the huddle of palm-leaf huts cowering behind it. Here by Cain's genius, according to the Genesis story, lies the origin of communal life, and all future social institutions. The Bible attributes this inventive possibility to our father of murder. The natural inference is obvious—that both his good and his evil, in their outgoings, sprang from his aggressive personality of boundless energy and restless genius! If Cain sinned, it was from this surging power of his, unbalanced and vehement. "He built a city."

Further, the records, (once more startlingly impartial), assert that this fund of power passed as a direct and cleansed inheritance to his descendants. Cain's line of heredity is definitely represented as leading to a string of people of genius and fertile invention! *Jabal,* one of his descendants, is said to be the "father of such as dwell in tents," people who could trek with their cattle and engage in commerce, the barterers of the world, who might migrate and find new lands. In them, the discerning eye can readily discover the founders of our own modern interlinked life, where the communications of business mean everything; and in such humble origins we can see the germ of commercial progress—the adventurous, migrating, and bartering spirit. *Jubal,* another descendant, is claimed to be the inventor of the harp and the pipe, a man of music and the arts, in whom we see the dawn of artistic things. *Tubal-Cain,* still another of this noted line, is reputed to be the first artificer in brass and iron, a craftsman of skill, in whom the latent seed of Cain's genius once more blossomed in new productive ways.

On any understanding of the Genesis story, this is a remarkable tribute to Cain's vigorous and inventive inheritance! If we believe in anything today, we believe in *breed.* We have proved that breed and race transmit vigour and quality. We see it both in disease and health, in animal and man. Hence the moral of this story of Cain's magnificent legacy to his own line is simple. It undoubtedly suggests the secret of his fall—abounding vitality, misused and misdirected, massive powers whose strength he himself did not know until too late, not great vice or unparalleled wickedness, but simply a big arrogant nature, rich and explosive, thrown off its balance by passion.

V

I have yet one thing to state in his favour. Some years after his crime, when his first child was born, he named him *Enoch.* That name, as Dr Driver points out, denotes "dedication," "a new start," "a fresh beginning." What a lovely and suggestive name for the child of a sinner like this! I know it is usual to deny Cain any true and effective repentance—on the principle, I suppose, that if we give a dog a bad name, we may as well drown him. People seem to argue that a man like Cain must have been by nature different from themselves, a species of wild beast, a kind of moral leper, to whom repentance was impossible. But is there not more than a suggestion in the name of his child that Cain came to himself in deeper ways than we imagine? May we not see in this name a dim recognition of God's wonderful mercy in shielding him from the consequences of his sin and giving him a new land and a new start? In time, he might find the best proof of that mercy even in his shameful brand: for while that brand was the emblem of his sin, it was also his protection from the consequences of his crime. He might come to realise, as many of us do with our own scars, that God's brand may prove His deepest mercy.

I like to think, therefore, that Cain who was like any one of us, was, like any one of us, capable of a cleansing and drenching sorrow. He called his little lad *Enoch,* because the father himself found in the son a new start. Life blossomed out afresh from the desert of sin in that little baby's life.

This is Cain as I see him in the records. Some people may retort that I have only whitewashed a black man! But the facts are not mine: they are from the records of Genesis. I only claim a place for my interpretation of the facts. I claim that they may reveal to us a man not separated from any of us as a prince of devils, or one who is beyond all ordinary moral computation, but one who stands on our own level, not at all an "enigma of iniquity" or one who was "criminally-minded," but simply a human being with an overdose of restless energy who allowed his turbulent passion to master him and was brought to his brother's blood by such common things as envy, jealousy, and anger, fanned in a high wind of passion.

If my reading is right, the moral of the story is plain. It is possible for any man to sin as he did, if he too has his untamed powers! A big nature, generously endowed but uncontrolled, will do it any time. The line between us and Cain is not too broad.

VI

These are my conclusions, then, from this ancient tale of tragedy.

In the first place, the greatest curse in human life is not wickedness, but power untamed. In the Middle Ages, the young aspirant for knighthood laid his sharp sword on God's altar, while he prayed steadfastly all the night. That sword represented power, to curse or bless. What the world needs is power, power even like Cain's, but *power consecrated!* We need the sword on the altar.

Further, Cain's story reveals how easily sin may gain dominion over an uncontrolled heart. It "croucheth at the door." What an arresting picture! Sin crawls like a panther, ready for its pounce. One can almost picture its green eyes! These eyes are flashing now on anyone in whom the red blood runs warmly, as in Cain. As I think of that sleek thing pawing at the door, I know that my own safety lies in a "great mastery." And thank God, if the panther prowls at the door, there is Someone Else there, unafraid of any beast, who knocks, and if he enters, brings perfect mastery to disordered souls.

Once more, the commonest cause of sin is not "the mind of vice" or the "criminal heart," but a passionate temper. How we laugh at temper! "It is nothing, and will pass." Preachers and moralists made too much of trifles like temper! Would God they were trifles! As it is, every deed of vengeance and crime, every wrong that has scarred life, and every ugly thing that has wounded man has come from such little things as temper, jealousy, and envy, *when fanned in a high wind!*

Lastly, here is the true psychology of Cain, by which a full-blown sin is born. A little pique or envy—what is that? A stir of resentment—who has not felt it? A nursed sense of grievance and injustice—have we not hugged it to our hearts? Then, a little anger fanned in a brisk wind, a hot word, a quick passion, a hand uplifted, and—"O God, how could I have done it?"

. . . . . .

We may blacken Cain as we like to account for his villainy. We may paint him, as so many do, as a monster hot from the mouth of hell. We may say that he must have been a true son of Belial to do a deed like this. We may assert that in the final estimate he was only *a bad man.* But the Bible's picture is the true one, true to facts and true to psychology—that Cain was a big forceful man with a quick and eager mind, capable of wonderful things, who let his passion drive him over the brink.

And he who runs may read.

AN ARGUMENT FOR ESAU

Apart from one scene in his life, gravely overstressed because as gravely misconstrued, Esau is one of the most lovable men in the Old Testament. That most people, especially young people, on a first reading of the tale, are profoundly contemptuous of Jacob and as profoundly sorry for his brother, is perhaps the best tribute to Esau's natural attractiveness. Right from their opening encounter to the grand climax of Esau's forgiveness, our sympathy and affection are enlisted and held by this frank, big-hearted man, just as we recoil instinctively from the plotting and tortuous mind of the brother who schemed so secretly and tenaciously to snatch what was not his own.

Later reflection may adjust our views, showing us that Esau is finally judged not so much by what he was as by what he was not. He is evidently condemned in the Bible for some subtle spiritual shortcoming. Yet even this later reflection does not mar our sincere pleasure in the undoubted charm of the man's frank and generous disposition.

In endowment of character, and especially in the winsome qualities of a fine nature, there is no comparison between Jacob and Esau. By every test that defines a gentleman, Esau is immeasurably superior. Indeed, our main wonder regarding his brother is that the grace of God could eventually fashion a saint out of such unpromising material! The glory of Jacob's record is not what he was in his own nature, but what the redeeming power of God, after much cleansing discipline, refined out of such conglomerate ore. He is not a triumph of Nature, but of Grace.

By contrast with his crafty and designing brother, Esau is one of the natural gentlemen of the Old Testament. He possesses some rare qualities of heart and mind that give him a distinctive appeal of his own. Indeed, apart from the one scene by which he is commonly condemned, he ranks next to Joseph for the beauty of a guileless nature, a mind that bears no grudge, and a heart so rich in native goodness that forgiveness flows from it full and easy.

In view of this consistent picture in the Old Testament, some people have wondered whether the discreditable birthright scene is not an insertion of a later tradition. That episode seems to be wholly "out of line" with all the other facts of his life and the qualities of his character. But is there any need to question the authenticity of the narrative on such a flimsy ground? On the one hand, are we not all complex creatures, so complex indeed that we are as much a puzzle to ourselves as to others? In any case, who of us is ever consistent? And on the other hand, to rid ourselves of our difficulties merely by denying them, or by sweeping aside whatever disagrees with our original premises, is too easy and too tempting.

I do not accept this easy way, for I feel that there is a legitimate, and to me unassailable, interpretation of the birthright scene that makes it not wholly inconsistent with the better side of Esau's character.

Meanwhile, when we remember that the story in Genesis is written more from the angle of Jacob as father of Israel's tribes than from the angle of Esau who represented Edom, the cousin-enemy of Israel, we are astounded at two things—on the one hand, the fairness of the Bible in showing in such bold relief the contrasted characters of these brothers, and especially the deceit and cunning of Jacob, and on the other hand, the engaging picture it furnishes of Esau as a "parfit knyght," although he was eventually cast aside from all its purposes of grace.

I

Before dealing with debatable questions and particularly with the episode of the birthright, let us examine the general background of character which the Bible paints in for Esau.

At the outset, the simple sketch of his life as a hunter and a lover of open spaces is a clear index of his preferences. This picture definitely suggests a big daring man, loving freedom and personal adventure, possessing great bodily strength and endurance, enjoying the tang of the hill wind on his cheek, and courageously pitting his skill and strategy against the wild powers of Nature. One detail alone—Jacob's constant physical fear of him—points unmistakably to the strong sinewy man, whose sport kept him in perfect trim, and who instinctively sought an adventure with an added spice of danger. This love of a hazardous life is a clear mark of the man, suggesting a "free soul," unconventional, daring, and finely self-reliant. In appearance, he is pictured with that red or flaxen strain in his colouring, perhaps in his hair, that crops out more often than we imagine in the Semitic race—the same type of ruddiness, it may be, that distinguished David. Altogether, the physical picture of Esau is wholly engaging, a Viking man in a Viking age, big, strong, and hirsute, resolute in action, honourable in his dealings, lordly in appearance, a fitting man to be the Duke of Edom.

When we pass to a consideration of his character, the picture is fully as charming. All through his life, in every experience narrated, he appears as a simple, happy, good-natured, trustful, and unsuspicious man. He looks out on life and his fellowmen with clear, honest eyes, always as by instinct believing the best of others, and certainly believing that they are as honest and straightforward as he himself is. He suspects no evil in his fellows, no hidden trap, and no double meaning. What a rare companion he must have been for the open road or for a hunting trip through the hills, never uncertain or moody, but reliable, open, hearty, and generous. Indeed, it was on this generous and unsuspicious trait of his character that Jacob so meanly counted when he craftily set his trap to undo him.

The difference between the two brothers in these engaging qualities is worthy of note. In his early days, Jacob seemed to be constitutionally incapable of looking at anything with straight eyes. He glanced round corners, and by preference would rather do a thing with difficult subtlety than do it openly and easily. Plots, stratagems, and intrigues were his native element. What he could not obtain by right, what indeed he had no right to obtain at all, he engineered by slimness and guile. There is hardly anyone of his early acquaintance whom he did not hoodwink and beguile, like the wily Ulysses. He tricked his brother, not once but often. Even at the end, when he was reconciled to Esau after his own sins had driven them apart, the very planning of the impressive meeting is full of hidden artifice and stratagem. He deceived his old blind father in that infamous incident that is one of the meanest and shadiest episodes in all literature. He tricked his uncle with amazing ingenuity, though in this action he was merely paying Laban back in his own crooked coin. It is little wonder that in later days his own sons, true stones from the same quarry, should have tricked him in turn with a blood-stained coat of many colours.

At times, Jacob's apologists, while strongly condemning his conduct, appear to praise him for the characteristics that hide behind his twisting artfulness—what they call his "forecasting outlook," his longheadedness, and his passion to obtain important things. But on the same principle, might one not equally praise the courage of a burglar or the foresight of an embezzler? It does not do to say that this crafty man could look forward and plan for big things, while Esau was content to live somnolently in the present with its immediate satisfactions. If Esau was content, it was for a sufficient reason—that by every law of God and man *he already possessed the big things!* The birthright and all its privileges, (the elder son's major portion, the headship of the clan, the judgeship in civil and criminal cases, the family priesthood, and the spiritual succession), were his already, and he needed neither to strive nor cheat to obtain them. Surely we must admit that one who already possesses the "big things" should not be voted easy-going because his contented faith contrasts with the restless plotting of someone who is planning to steal these possessions from his hands.

In any case, when contrasting Jacob and Esau, we should remember that up to what we might call his "conversion," there is little in Jacob's life that is not both selfish and worldly. It is quite obvious that he was as greedy for the birthright with its material gains, (its greater portion and its outward privileges), as any materially-minded Hebrew has ever been! To say that he was plotting only, or mainly, for the "spiritual succession" and not for the material gains of the birthright is equal bias and folly on our part, and makes the pursuit of spiritual things a laughing-stock. Though in later experience, by the refining touch of God's grace, he consecrated his qualities of mind to better things, yet in his early days these very qualities were his shame, for, as we know, he used them only for knavery and deceit. It is ridiculous to call any quality a "virtue" if it is vilely misused. Nothing is a virtue that is not virtuous!

II

In addition to this beautiful attribute of an unsuspicious and trusting mind, Esau is shown to possess some very engaging qualities.

Nothing can be more beautiful, for instance, than his unfailing devotion, his instinctive courtesy and gentleness to his blind father. Rebekah and Jacob made a shameless misuse of Isaac's infirmity for their own perverted ends. Without the loyalty and innocence of Esau, that Hebrew home would have been a shameful and pitiful place! We know how considerate and loyal Esau was to his blind parent, going out of his way to humour his doting fancies and bringing simple pleasures to the old man, so pathetically bound to his chair. This is not only filial piety, it has an added touch of a beautiful chivalry.

But the most charming picture of his loyalty occurs near his father's end. When by the very people who should have respected his infirmity Isaac was tricked into giving the blessing of the firstborn to the mumming Jacob, Esau's conduct, though he was bitterly wronged, was wholly admirable. We know that he was angry, fiercely and justifiably angry—a fact, by the way, that refutes the common idea that he was indifferent to the spiritual aspect of the birthright. In his great anger he threatened the life of the thieving brother who had been to him like a snake in the grass. But even here, amid his passion, his love and respect for his father shone beautifully. Lest he should bring one unneeded note of sorrow into the old man's shortening days, he volunteered to withhold his itching hands from Jacob's body, and of his own initiative quietly undertook to keep the peace in the home so long as his father should live. That is a touch both of mingled strength and gentleness that is not often noticed. It reveals Esau's native grandeur.

Incidentally, it was Esau's respect for his father and his magnificent restraint that gave Jacob his chance of stealing from the home, in fear of his mighty brother, and adventuring into the desert to save his skin. By this flight, (ironic stroke of Nemesis!), Jacob never received what he had sinned to get. He never possessed any of the material, judicial, or headship privileges of the birthright that had appealed so much to his worldly soul, when he was indeed a worldly man. We often say that he gained the birthright, but, in actual fact, he never possessed it! He was left only with the spiritual benediction he had stolen, which at that time in his scheming soul he valued least of all. In his deadly fear of the big Esau he left everything, *even his own* *natural portion as a younger son,* and fled in panic into the empty desert. Thereafter, he had to carve out his fortunes by the sweat of his brow, and anything he ever possessed was the fruit of his own hard toil. The historic fact is that he never received any part of the birthright except the blessing. The final glory of his record lies in this, that losing all the material things he had sinned to get, he yet found *God* in that empty desert, found Him among the stabs of a guilty conscience and the rough discipline of hardship and sorrow. It was then, and only then, that he discovered how much the spiritual blessing counted.

III

One glorious trait of Esau's character which we cannot fail to admire is his attitude to the sinning Jacob. In spite of his brother's deceit and theft, he held no grudge and nursed no grievance in his heart. If ever a man had been wronged, he had been wronged. (We may leave the pottage scene out of our consideration for the moment, for, as I hope to show, it had no real significance for him, and therefore left no bitterness.) But he had been basely cheated when Jacob robbed him of his father's blessing, which represented the "spiritual crown" of the birthright. He valued that blessing deeply, both for its own sake and for the father he loved. As the Epistle to the Hebrews so generously admits, he sought *with tears* to find an opportunity for reinstatement in his father's blessing. But Isaac, having once given the blessing, would not, or could not, recall it. Esau was passionately grieved at this, but, (again sincerely loyal to his father), he bowed to the inevitable. Yet his understanding of his father's point of view did not lessen his sense of injustice and wrong. Nonetheless, in spite of his loss, he did not hold an embittered heart throughout the years, and did not spoil his life by keeping his wounds open. It does not do to say that he was only an easy-going, careless fellow, who forgot quickly because he did not feel deeply. The blazing yet restrained anger that sent Jacob scuttling in fear to far-off places is sufficient disproof of this. I admire him for that great, just anger, but I admire him more for the kindly tenderness that held it in leash lest he should bring a deeper sorrow on Isaac's honoured head.

This fine quality is crowned at last by his wonderful forgiveness. How can one read that great chapter of the brothers' reunion, after twenty years' separation through Jacob's sin, without feeling that Esau is great in everything that makes a real gentleman? Still true to his character, even after the purging of his spiritual experiences, Jacob plans the unavoidable meeting like an astute strategist. Every detail of arrangement still betrays his native wiliness. His preparations for the disposal of his company, his palpable fear at meeting his wronged brother, his arrangements for propitiatory gifts, his servile bowing to the ground, and even his toadying words of address (Genesis xxxiii. 10) are still true to type, and are somewhat contemptible. On the other hand, throughout the whole act, Esau is the "grand man," open, direct, honest, and beautifully forgiving.

I cannot help thinking that Esau's sense of humour played a piquant part in the story. Some of the details suggest that he had planned the kind of

Homeric joke that passed for humour in those days. He sent forward word, by Jacob's own returning messengers, that he was coming to meet him *with four hundred men!* He emphasised the number, and no doubt saw to it that the messengers should give it due prominence! He did this, there is no doubt, for the obvious reason that Jacob might quake in his shoes and thereby die a hundred deaths at the instance of his guilty conscience! All the time, Esau must have been smiling at Jacob's imagined fears. But this was the only punishment he planned in his soft heart, (and he could only do it at a distance), for as soon as he saw his brother, his heart was so full of wistful memories of the old days as lads together that he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him! O big, soft heart of Esau, I am glad to think that your deep wrong left no unhealed wound in your soul, and that you exercised a godly forgiveness. I cannot help imagining that the young boy Jesus loved to hear His mother in the evenings at Nazareth read aloud this charming story of your open heart, for in after days when He wished to picture a father's forgiveness for a wandering prodigal, He took the very language of your act and applied it to God! Altogether, this is one of the loveliest scenes in the Old Testament—that wronged man running in his eagerness to the stooping sinner, raising him up, taking him in his arms, and kissing him. It is forgiveness personified.

But even beyond his beautiful magnanimity, there is one more touch in Esau on which I love to dwell as the mark of a true gentleman, something indeed that stamps him in my mind as a "verray parfit gentil knyght." Jacob, (is he trying to make restitution, or only to lead Esau to deal softly with him?) offers his brother immense and costly presents. Very kindly, very courteously, and yet in his usual honest fashion, Esau refuses these gifts, saying simply, "I have enough; my brother, let what thou hast be thine." (Notice the dignified simplicity of that honest sentence, *"I have enough."* He is the only Hebrew in the Bible who ever said it!) But Jacob pressed him, somewhat insistently, ("urged him," says the narrative), to take these gifts. A smaller man than Esau would still have refused, for all kinds of reasons, good and bad. But, gentleman to the last, he accepts his brother's importunate presents, though they were wholly unneeded by one of such great wealth and power, the Lord of Edom with four hundred men! But the natural knighthood of the man leads him to accept the gifts with an easy charm, more I dare say for Jacob's sake than his own, and he shows that rare and courtly art of how to accept even an unwanted gift gracefully and thus put the other man at his ease and give him pleasure.

This is our Esau in the Bible story, one of the most charming, kindly, and lovable people in literature. Is there any figure in the Old Testament, with the exception of Joseph, who is so much the "big man," above jealousy, grievance, hate, and revenge? His positive virtues are a glory—gentle amid all his rough bigness, kindly as a great leader to everybody who served with him, honouring and humouring an afflicted parent whom others deceived, unsuspicous, trustful and honest in all his dealings, courteous and considerate beyond the ideas of his age, bearing no dragging grudge for a wrong that changed the current of his life, tender and forgiving when, like

Joseph, he had his brother-enemy in the hollow of his hand. He is truly the grand man, a knightly soul, my Lord Esau, the Great Duke.

IV

If we come now to what might be termed the "debit" side of Esau's character, we shall find that the only judgment recorded against him, in the Bible or out of it, is founded on that dramatic scene of the red pottage. It is my claim that this scene has been gravely misunderstood and misconstrued.

The story tells how the lure of the hunt had enticed Esau out on one of his big expeditions, where, with the puny weapons of his day, he matched his stalking skill and patience against the wariness of wild Nature. But on this occasion his venture proved fruitless. After weary hours, perhaps days, of scouting and prospecting, he returned home in the late evening, spent and broken, overcome by the very reaction of his long strain and labour.

It is easy for us to underestimate his hunger and his spent body. There is hardly a commentator I have read who does not pass some slighting, even sneering, remark about his exaggerated hunger, attributing his eagerness to petulant lack of restraint. Why so? I wonder how many of our arm-chair commentators know anything about hunger, imperious hunger? Hunger is a queer master, as even Jesus found in the Temptation Scene in the desert.

While yet some distance from the home tents that Jacob, the "plain" and sedate man, loved to haunt, Esau spied the flickering glow of a fire some yards off the beaten track. Spent beyond measure and faint with weakness, he turned aside, knowing that by the unwritten laws of desert hospitality, any Bedouin tribesman would gladly give him a ration of bread and a drink from his water-skin to take him on his way. But the expected Bedouin was the unexpected Jacob, who had planned one of his arch schemes to trade on his brother's fatigue and trust. When the stumbling huntsman saw Jacob's pot of milled lentils and felt the bewildering aroma catch his parched throat like a pain, he asked gaspingly for a dish of his food.

The guileless Esau was too unsuspicious by nature, and too spent with fatigue, to wonder what chance lot had brought the tent-loving Jacob so far afield? All he knew was a joy that this was his brother, and as his brother, seeing his faintness, Jacob would surely give him some of the red lentils that filled the air with their strangling fragrance. "Some of that savoury thing, Jacob. I am all in! Quick! I am like to die. Some of that savoury thing."

It is at this quick, gasping eagerness of the fainting man that some of our fastidious commentators have gibed, interpreting his cry as unmanly greed and a petulant lack of self-restraint. This is very amusing: and it expresses an unworthy genius for special pleading! Here is an "uncontrolled nature," they say, as they sit by their study fire and write of these far-off days when men had to hunt for their meat before they cooked it. Even a sane commentator like Marcus Dods may colour facts with his own paint. His cosy comment on Esau's imperious hunger is as follows. (I quote it literally in case one might think my paraphrase untrue): "*Who does not feel contempt for the great strong man, declaring he* *will die if he is required to wait five minutes till his own supper is prepared: forgetting, in the craving of his appetite, every consideration of a worthy kind: and oblivious of everything but his hunger and his food: crying, like a great baby, Feed me with that red! So it is always with the man who has fallen under the power of sensual appetite.*" What can one make of special pleading like this, which totally ignores any historical understanding of that rough age, and so evidently depreciates Esau's gruelling experience? We have no right to attribute *sensual appetite* to a starving man! Why do our commentators not interpret the scene for what it evidently is, (for what indeed the record says it is), desolating faintness? I wonder sometimes if our professors have ever been hungry, brutally hungry, hungry as many a soldier in France, cut off in a redoubt, has been hungry? I have seen a cultured man in our battalion gulp food like a wolf, and have thought none the less of him for it. The good critics, speaking of Esau's broken cry, say that it argues only an "uncontrolled nature." No! It argues only one thing—*gaunt commanding hunger!*

At this point, before we examine the incident, I wish you to remember one fact. Even in his present faintness, that huge Esau could have taken his crafty, tent-loving brother and twisted him like putty in his big hands. All through his life Jacob is haunted with a personal fear of that strong, amazing man. There was no reason in the world for Esau to make any haggling bargain for food. All he need have done, in his dire strait, was to push this small man aside and take what he needed. We have to remember this fact if we are to understand the irony, the humour, and the essential farce of what now took place.

In the pitiable scene that Jacob had so brazenly planned, every natural man's sympathy is wholly with Esau. No decent tribesman would deny a bone to a stray dog amid such desperation, or make use of a man's extremity to strike a shameless bargain. But Jacob, whose wiliness is only rivalled by his cruelty, stated his infamous terms. "Sell me thy birthright," he said, "and I will give you the pottage." It will not do, my dear commentator, to argue that behind this low cunning there lies on Jacob's part "*a true valuation of higher things.*" Let us be done with such special pleading! All that Jacob's act argues is that he wanted, by hook or by crook, what the birthright would bring him, and to get it he was ready to use any unbrotherly means to further his ends. It is time we admitted that before he was "converted," Jacob was just as materialistic as any irreligious Hebrew has ever been, and, to put it frankly, before he was a saint, he was a worldling. It is only to the greater glory of God's amazing grace that He could, in the end, manufacture a saint out of such tragic stuff!

Most of us call this scene Esau's tragedy. We do so because we think that some real definite transaction of barter took place round this fire, and that Esau parted with his birthright for a mess of pottage. I have no doubt that the scene itself is real, (it is too vivid not to be real), but the reputed transaction, if calmly considered in the light of known facts, is farcical. There is only one thing of which we can be sure—*no binding sale or exchange of the birthright took place in this scene.* If we realise this, the stress we commonly lay on the story will be considerably altered.

What are the facts?

1. I have already mentioned the first fact—that Esau need never have entered into any such ludicrous bargain! With Jacob's deadly fear of his personal strength, all he needed to have done was to push the man aside and take what he needed. But when Esau heard Jacob's terms, he laughed like Ajax. Why do I know he laughed? The proof lies in the second fact.

2. It is beyond doubt that the birthright could not be bartered by anyone without the tribal consent. It was not Esau's to sell or Jacob's to buy. Jacob and Esau both knew this fact.

As we know, this birthright was the inalienable right of the firstborn. Not only could no one sell it and no one buy it, but even the father, who had the privilege of conveying and confirming it in his blessing, *could not divert it* from the firstborn. Deuteronomy xxi. 15 to 17 makes this point unassailable. There it is laid down that even "the hated elder son of a hated wife" cannot be dispossessed, even at the instance of the father who has the nominal right of confirming the birthright by his blessing. If this was the strict law in the days of Deuteronomy, it was even more strict in patriarchal times, when, for the good of the clan, ancestral rights had to be sacrosanct. The birthright in patriarchal days belonged to the firstborn even more rigidly than the law of primogeniture and entail made it in feudal times. To make this birthright the "sure possession" of the firstborn was the old world's legal procedure for establishing the continued identity of the clan! Thus, not even a hating father could will it away or divert it from the rightful heir. This fact was as clearly known both to Jacob and Esau as it should be to us.

It is hard for us, in our day and with our ideas, to understand just how unassailable was this right of the firstborn to the birthright in early Hebrew life. With us the firstborn has only at best a *legal* standing: with the Hebrews he had also a *religious* standing, Hebrew law (Exodus xiii. 12 and 13) proclaims that the firstborn, if a son, *belongs to Jehovah*, and (because he is the firstborn) must be redeemed from all forms of captivity or bondage! His privileges are such, (as heir and as God's chosen vessel), that his rights must be fully assured. We must never forget the deep religious significance that the Hebrew mind, from the earliest times, attached to the firstborn, "as him that openeth the womb," and the first of his father's strength.

Moreover, there is no known instance in Bible history where, if the heir claimed it, as we know Esau did, the birthright was set aside even by the most autocratic father. The case of Reuben, who is said by later Hebrews to have lost the birthright by his sin, is not relevant. He never forfeited the birthright, but all through his life actually possessed the full privileges of the firstborn. It was only when the tribe of Reuben in later days was submerged and lost in its outpost territory that the nominal birthright was transferred from Reuben to the sons of Joseph (not to Joseph or any of his brethren, but to the "sons of Joseph") to preserve the descent. In this instance, moreover, it is deliberately said (1

Chronicles v. 1) that Reuben's name continued to remain first in the tribal registers; and in his dying blessing Jacob gave him the right of the firstborn.

It should also be noticed that though Jacob, by Isaac's blessing, entered into the spiritual promises, yet, in the Bible genealogies, *Esau's line is given first,* as the firstborn and holder of the clan birthright. The same is true even of Ishmael as against Isaac, for though Isaac inherited the spiritual succession, Ishmael as firstborn held the legal birthright, and his genealogy is given first. That scene where Hagar, his mother, is mysteriously led to find water for her fainting boy shows us the Bible's religious care for the life of the firstborn.

Dr Marcus Dods, in a vain search for a parallel to the reputed bargain of this scene, quotes an Arabic story which is entirely pointless. His "parallel" has to do, *not with tribal succession and the father's blessing* but with an outside right of Temple guardianship. Although a family possession, this Temple right was undoubtedly in the owner's power to sell; and as a parallel the incident has no point. Let us realise, therefore, this governing fact, *that without the father's, the holder's, and the tribe's agreement the birthright could not possibly be bartered for anything,* let alone a mess of pottage, and *it could not be alienated even by the father.* These are facts that were perfectly well known by Semitic law and custom both to Jacob and Esau before and after the scene.

The only explanation of the incident, therefore, is that both men knew that the transaction they were carrying through was an acted comedy. In this fact lay, as I hope to show, the essential profanity of

Esau! Their farcical bargain had no legal validity and no binding terms. The birthright was not theirs either to buy or sell. It was the father's privilege, and his alone, to convey the birthright at the proper time to the firstborn, and to him alone, with his official blessing, but not even he could knowingly divert it! There is only one conclusion from the facts of Hebrew law and history—that the scene between Jacob and Esau represented a *mock auction:* and in the fact that he consented to the essential profanity of this, and allowed holy things to be made the subject of a vulgar jest, lies the sin of Esau. He put his birthright up to mock sale, and thus gravely "despised" it.

3. A further proof of the essential farce of the bargain lies in the equally forgotten fact that neither of these two men ever presumed, in their later dealings, that any binding transaction had taken place! Jacob never banked on his supposed right of purchase, and made no claim on the strength of it. If he had done so, the ancient world would have laughed at his claim as at an inconceivably humorous situation. It is true that in his lament after the loss of the blessing, Esau is represented as saying that Jacob is tragically true to his name, supplanter, "For he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing." But this is quite evidently the reflection of a later period, *for at that moment neither of them had received the birthright!* Isaac, being alive, still held the chieftainship, retained his material possessions, exercised his judicial prerogatives, and acted as priest and father of the clan. In-

deed, in giving the blessing, he had just performed one distinctive function of his priesthood. It is only now, in his last days, that he is preparing to demit office. Thus it is evident that up to this moment, neither Esau nor Jacob had entered into the birthright, and after this, because of his ignominious flight, Jacob had no chance. Nothing, therefore, can alter the fact that this pottage scene and its reputed bargain *played no part whatever in the ultimate bestowal of the birthright and the blessing*. There should be no mistake in our minds about this.

4. For, (and this is conclusive evidence that the bargain was a mock sale), when Jacob wished in later days to obtain the blessing that crowned the birthright, *he was forced to resort to another act of guile to filch it!* In order to win the confirming blessing of the father, he had to plan a fresh deceit to hoodwink the blind man. It is quite evident that Isaac knew nothing whatever of that reputed earlier bargain. He was actually preparing, according to ancient custom, to hand on the birthright blessing to the elder son. We remember the poignant scene of his betrayal and grief. As his unpractised fingers fumbled over Jacob's masked face and hands, he thought that he was in truth bestowing the gift upon his firstborn. When he discovered how his sacred feelings had been played upon and the traditions of generations violated, and especially when he knew that his office as God's priest had been abused, we can understand his helpless grief. Yet he knew that in the intention of his heart the real blessing had gone out from his soul like a veritable sacrament. In his idea this sacred, priestly blessing could not

be recalled, for it had been given in a genuine, priestly function. At least, in his deep piety, he chose to think that the spiritual blessing was irrevocable: and in spite of Esau's agony and fierce tears, he allowed Jacob to retain the unintended benediction.

5. Even in spite of Isaac's ruling that the "blessing" could not be recalled, it is beyond any doubt that *Jacob never did receive the full birthright but only the spiritual blessing that was its religious part,* which he had acquired in roguery. In fact, his sin cheated him not only of the major portion of the estate, the judicial functions, and the clan chieftainship that went with the birthright, but also of his own natural portion as a younger son! For in face of Esau's wild cry, (disproving by the way two things, his part in the alleged earlier bargain, and also the common charge that he was indifferent to his spiritual privileges), Jacob fled into the wilderness for safety, leaving everything behind him in panic. All he obtained was that solitary part of the whole birthright, the spiritual blessing, that he had stolen—and let us remember that he kept this simply because Isaac, as a reverent and even superstitious man, would not recall it. What he had given as God's priest, as in a holy sacrament, Isaac would not recall.

But it is an unquestionable fact that Jacob never possessed any of the privileges or rights of the first-born except the benediction he obtained by fraud! That is the ironic Nemesis of his sin—that in his early, grasping days he had planned and wormed his way to win the material things his heart craved, and yet was left only with what he thought at the moment a barren benediction. In days to come, when God had chiselled his rough character, that benediction became his prize and boast! But that day was yet to be.

V

With these facts in our mind, let us turn to the infamous pottage scene and try to reconstruct what took place.

Esau, worn and spent, asked his brother for his dish of lentils. Jacob replied, "Sell me your birthright and I will feed you." I have spoken already of Esau's type of Arab humour. I find a supreme instance of it here. Imagine the scene. Esau the big man, although tired beyond measure, might easily have pushed the smaller Jacob aside and taken what he needed. But when he heard his brother's quaint suggestion of a barter of the birthright, he must have laughed like Homer. Both men knew that to buy or sell the birthright was impossible—besides the final conferring lay in other hands. I might as well offer to sell some personal friends the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London for a dish of lentils, as these men to buy and sell what was unsellable. Hence, when Esau heard the ludicrous proposal, he said to himself: "This is another of my queer brother's odd pranks! If he wants to enjoy a piece of mummery, why not join him? Let it be so, Jacob! The Crown Jewels of England, the Magic Stone of the Mikado, the Diamond of the Great Mogul, *my birthright, or any other impossible thing,* for your dish of lentils! If we are acting a comedy, let us act it well." So Esau with his broad humour entered lightly into the Homeric farce.

But Jacob, an ancient Iago, was not merely playing: or if he was playing, he was playing to condemn

Esau in man's eyes and God's for ever. If only he could prove that his elder brother treated his sacred birthright as a joke! "Swear, then, by all that is holy, that you will sell me your birthright." "Wonderful man, our Jacob!" thought Esau. "When he acts a part, he is the real artist, and *lives* it!" "I swear," said Esau in his easy laughter, "if we are playing games, like children, let us play them well!" And as if enjoying some rich humour, he swore his oath to please the strange whim of this quaint brother whose subtleties he never understood. What a comedy of big children, thought Esau, to pretend to barter what was unbarterable!

To my mind, there is no other explanation of this scene that suits the facts of Hebrew law and history. Esau, in his big easy nature, treated the affair for what it was, a gargantuan comedy. But that was Jacob's subtle plot, not to buy the birthright in any supposed bargain, (that was impossible), but to condemn Esau for ever in the world's eyes as one who, in joke and pretence, would sell even a spiritual privilege! And to this day, the innocent-minded Esau in his guileless good nature, (handled like the Moor in the guile of Iago), is regarded in the Bible's phrase as a *profane or secular man.* He put a holy thing up to a mock auction.

I suppose there is justice in the Bible's and the world's verdict. There are things in this life that no man has a right even to ridicule. I suppose the final definition of a profane man is simply that he can jest about holy things. There is no adjective except "profane" to describe one who can barter in a farce such holy things as *love, marriage, sorrow, the soul, or God.* It is the quintessence of the secular mind that it can laugh about some things that are ultimately *serious.*

What is the sin of Esau?

It is not that he sold the birthright. He did not. Indeed, he could not. Neither he nor Jacob ever presumed that he did. Actually Esau entered into the full birthright in due course, with the exception of the purloined blessing. There was no bargain pledged here that was worth the snap of our fingers. His sin was not that he sold the birthright, but that he sold it in a mock deal, and joked profanely about his great spiritual privileges. In answer to Jacob's impudent suggestion of a ribald bargain, Esau's reply should have been plain. "My birthright, as God's priest and as judge among my people, is not a subject for unholy mirth: I can as little put my eternal soul up to auction." Hence to the Bible, (and whatever the Bible is, it is *serious*), Esau is a "profane" man, a secular man, who even in an acted farce could make spiritual privileges a source of comedy!

VI

We shall have to revise some of our judgments of Esau.

First of all, we shall be forced to clear our thoughts of the accepted notion that the birthright was legally bought and sold in this camp-fire scene. No such transaction was possible; and neither Jacob, Esau, nor Isaac in future days ever considered that a valid bargain had been struck. Thereby we acquit Esau of what the world has justly regarded as an infamous affair. In the light of our facts, that scene is only a carefully-staged effect on Jacob's part *to* *lead Esau into a definite spiritual sin.* That is the deeply sinister part of Jacob's plot. Esau's sin is therefore obvious. It consists in this, that while Jacob was deadly, even viciously, *serious* about winning the birthright, soon or late, by fair means or foul, Esau with an easy heart and a casual laugh readily made it a subject of comedy. He put his spiritual privileges up to a jesting bargain. The future of Israel might lie with a sinner but not with a comedian!

Secondly, we must acquit Esau of "despising" the birthright in any other sense than making it a silly jest. We know that he valued the birthright and its wonderful privileges. I can never read that haunting verse, one of the gems of literature for mere beauty and pathos, without a quick catch in my throat: "*And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.*" The Epistle to the Hebrews, which rightly calls him a "profane" person, asserts that he sought "with tears" to be readmitted to the stolen birthright blessing. The Bible's general verdict on the man is that *he despised his birthright.* Yes! But not as we commonly interpret that! He did not hold it cheap, or count it of no value, or part with it for a mess of pottage. His sin is this, (at his brother's subtle prompting), that he treated it as a subject for farce and put it up to comic barter.

Thirdly, it was not because of this pottage scene that he forfeited anything. *He certainly did not forfeit the birthright, except that spiritual benediction mistakenly bestowed on Jacob, which Isaac would not withdraw.* "Facts are chiels that winna ding." And the one fact we know is that he alone, when his brother fled, remained at home and entered naturally into all the privileges of the elder son with the exception, of course, of the stolen blessing. But he was not disinherited, or disendowed, or "dismissed" from the birthright. What he lost, (the big thing, I admit, so far as the future of Israel was concerned), was due to a later deceit on the part of Jacob and to Isaac's pious scruples.

Further, we must acquit him of being a "material" man. He cared less for the worldly gear of life than Jacob did in his unregenerate days. Of the two men who lived in that wretched home of parental favouritism, Jacob, in his young manhood, was the more grasping and sordid. Even in his prayers he bargains with God, and bargains, you will observe, for material blessings! "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." It is hard to conceive of Esau, gay and daring, with his free cavalier life, ever caring for the burdensome things of the world in a passion like that. The true hunter, like Esau, always sits lightly to worldly goods. In the end, amid his overwhelming loss, (never forget this), his only cry is, "*Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?*"

This means, finally, that we must acquit him of being either irreligious or unspiritual. There is no doubt that he did not possess the depth of Jacob, the depth down and the depth up! Jacob was that weird, passionate, introspective kind of soul who had infinite possibilities either way. In the end, he became the saint and father of Israel because he learned to grasp God with the same fervour as he had once grasped the world. But while Esau had not the sweep of Jacob, God was yet very real to him, not perhaps in the same deep wonderful "mystery of grace" as He was to the awakened Jacob, but rather as a friendly, natural, and happy Companion. It is wrong to say that Jacob's is the only type of religion —that deep, amazing disturbance that runs like a spuming torrent through lives like Paul, Augustine, Bunyan, and his own. There is another type of saint, gentler, happier, and less austere, who thinks of God in natural happiness and counts Him a "friend" like Abraham. Among these are many true saints like St John, Brother Lawrence, and Francis of Assisi. I cannot help thinking that beside them, as a bright, joyous, kindly man, generous, good, and courteous, honouring the afflicted, bearing no grudge, loving and forgiving, stands the big smiling figure of gallant Esau, whose one sin was that in a mortally serious world he laughed too easily and loved the comic muse!

Farewell, Esau! With other little children, I have always loved you well. You were not serious enough to carry the deep messages of grace to a wounded and desperate world. And God chose the brooding Jacob, in His mysterious way, as the heir of the spiritual promises, even through a stolen blessing. But you stand as a charming prototype of the sunny soul that makes religion happy and natural, and worships Jehovah best in a clean, frank, and honourable life. And perhaps you lived too early for your own grave and serious day in seeing that humour in itself may not be irreligious!

Perhaps even now the world is too young and too serious to understand that there may be such a thing as the Humour of God.

AN APPRECIATION OF KORAH, THE REBEL

IT HAS been said, more or less wisely, that people may be judged and classed by *the things they tolerate!* What a man allows or sanctions to exist around him in his city or state, unchallenged or unaltered, may be a clear index of his moral and spiritual condition. If this principle of judgment applies to individuals, it may be applied as reasonably to nations and generations. For instance, it may one day be said of us, in ages yet to be, that, in spite of all our pretension to culture and science, we of the twentieth century must have been barbarians at heart, for we quietly tolerated the scandal of the slums, the menace of needless poverty, and the national vice of drunkenness! Thus, we and our age may be judged simply by the outrageous things we allowed to exist or did nothing to alter.

If it is true that our character and moral outlook may be judged by the things we tolerate, it is equally true that our worth is known by the things against which we rebel! The one is only a complement of the other. There are certain periods in British and American history, for instance, that are made glorious just by the wild rebellions that broke out in their midst. These rebellions argue big things. For though many of them were crushed and broken in blood and tears, (perhaps even rightly crushed), yet the age in which they took place is now a glory: for we see that many of the people had the dream and the passion to rise in revolt against something intolerable, and were ready to die for principle. I verily believe that men and nations alike may be known and valued *by the things they will not tolerate*—will not tolerate at any cost—even at the last cost of blood!

Our spiritual life may be judged by our rebellions.

I

There is one strange incident in Old Testament history that has not been regarded often enough in this softening and chastening light.

This incident centres round the one civil rebellion led by Korah against Moses, which took place in the early days of Israel's new freedom. It represented a clash of policies, in state and religion, that had to be faced sooner or later. In this sense, Korah and his friends, the rebel chiefs, do not represent only themselves or their own actual revolt, but also great principles of policy that were bound to emerge in the formative life of Israel, as they emerge in the life of any thoughtful and progressive people. Thus we shall be wise, perhaps, not to regard this particular struggle as merely a personal and accidental brush between Moses and Korah, due to one man's arrogance or another man's envy, but rather as the eternal conflict of great principles that must be faced, in some guise or other, in the lives of thoughtful men and nations.

The story in its main features may be simply told.

Israel had just emerged from its long disabling experience of Egyptian slavery. While it is right to say that this slavery may not be compared with any modern types of slavery in social degradation and pitiless mastery, yet it was vicious enough and thorough enough to prevent the Israelites from having any national unity or any idea of political cohesion. Indeed, as they came out on their great trek to the adventure of freedom and a new life, we can hardly call them a "nation" at all, except by courtesy. They were little more than a disordered rabble who had been broken up in separate bands throughout Egypt, and were united only in the fact of their common origin and religious aspirations. Years of bondage had not only ruined their morale, but had also unfitted them for any proper self-government. For their experience in Egypt had given them no consciousness of political unity, and they had acquired no training in social discipline.

Hence, when they went out in that precipitate rush into the free deserts of Arabia, they were little more than what I have called a *social rabble*. They had no notion of rule, government, law, or order. We can readily understand, therefore, the type of thankless task that Moses, their deliverer and captain, had to face. He had only "raw material" to work with, and worse, raw material that had been softened and spoiled by generations of unresponsible living, where even the ordinary routine of daily life had been dictated by others. It is not too much to say that the so-called nation was little more than a *mob,* with no laws, no discipline, no saving traditions, no prestige, no independent communal experience, no national ideals, and no principles of government.

Now a nation, then or now, cannot live if it is only a mob! The enemies without, (and far more, the enemies within), would quickly bring wreck and dissolution. A nation, to be a nation, must be governed. It does not matter whether it be governed from inside or outside, but it must be governed! It must learn not only to make laws, but also (more serious) to *honour* laws and *obey* laws. It must, therefore, have some "central authority" that is recognised and obeyed. Ideally, it does not matter what that central authority is, or what form it assumes. It may take the guise of a Dictator like Mussolini, a Republic like the United States, a limited Monarchy and Parliament like the British Empire, or a Soviet rule like Russia. The point is —there must be central authority, representing law, rule, and executive administration. Without that central authority, recognised and honoured, a people is only a rabble.

We know from the records how Moses faced this amazing task. Owing to the inherited social disorganisation of the people, it was a greater problem than any single leader has ever had to tackle. His difficulties would have daunted any other man and finally broken his spirit and faith. But in the strength of God, and with his own genius for leadership, Moses wrought miracles. First, he gave them *Law,* (the one thing they lacked), that Divine Law comprised in the Commandments, and also that early code of social laws of justice and right which alone can make a nation an "organism." Secondly, he definitely assumed personal rule. Bit by bit, step by step, as a man of power and as a natural leader, he gathered up the loose reins into his own capable hands. At first this was comparatively easy, for he had the prestige of a successful adventure behind him, and he possessed the people's confidence and gratitude. Later on, when murmuring arose, his own genius, under God's guidance and blessing, made him more and more the "indispensable man." Each new difficulty from within, or each unexpected danger from without—both alike bravely faced—only established his personal authority more unquestionably. He fed on his victories.

His plan for the control and training of the people had two aspects. On the one hand, he established Aaron, his brother, as "presiding priest" over the religious life of the tribes, thus creating a new office and function that had far-reaching results for the future of the nation. On the other hand, he himself took the personal direction of all the social, judicial, and communal concerns into his own magnificent care. In time, chiefly through the sage advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, (a spectator who, like others of his order, saw most of the game!), he learned to devolve authority upon others, choosing capable men for the more routine work of government, and thus setting himself free for the bigger concerns of tribal and national policy.

A drastic change like this—from a heterogeneous mob into a more or less ordered people—does not pass without comment or complaint. There are always other capable men who become restive, envious, angry, or suspicious. They themselves, perhaps, could not carry through the big constructive work. But once it is done, and the formless thing gradually takes shape, they begin to wonder why they ever allowed a strong man like Moses to assume so much control. They may be thankful enough for his services and may acknowledge his marvellous gifts, but they are in deadly fear lest the strong man who has saved them should overstep the mark and become an indispensable dictator.

II

This is exactly what happened in the story of Korah and his companions.

In the narrative in the Book of Numbers, the issues between the various parties at conflict are somewhat intertwined, for there are evidently two or three threads in the united coil of revolt. But at least two of these threads are easily disentangled.

Certain men, 250 in number, princes or chiefs among the tribes, who were united under the leadership of Korah as spokesman, noted the two main tendencies to which I have referred and protested violently against them. In the first place, they noted the slow but steady growth of Moses' temporal power. To them, this had a suggestion of what the Greeks would call a "tyranny" and we a dictatorship. In the second place, they protested against Aaron's assumption of "caste" as a high priest and his arrogation of special privileges to himself. Many of these rebels, chiefs and priests themselves in tribal rights, felt that if these tendencies were allowed to pass unchecked, unquestioned, or unchallenged, there might be no end to the process. Public and private liberties in Israel might be seriously endangered.

This situation of suspicion and uneasiness undoubtedly lies at the back of Korah's historic rebellion. We cannot know whether the motives in the minds of these people were mainly envy, anger, and needless jealousy, or whether they had in their hearts some genuine and disinterested concern for popular liberties. Probably, it would be safe to hazard that their action had the usual mixture of motives, good and bad, that commonly lead to political and religious revolt. Speaking personally, I cannot believe that all these 250 chiefs, (described in the records so fairly as "famous in the congregation, men of renown"), could be actuated and inspired *solely* by mean envy and jealousy! There must have been serious uneasiness in the minds of many thoughtful people over the trend of events.

Moreover, Korah himself speaks so reasonably and yet so boldly, and lays his arguments for popular rights so broadly and definitely before us, that I cannot think of him except as, in some ways, an honest man, who was so deeply stirred by these tendencies towards autocratic and priestly rule, and was so concerned for the welfare of Israel, that he was forced to make a protest to ease his conscience. Whether we acquit Korah of evil motives or not, such a large and influential revolt of the leaders in the tribes shows convincingly that many of the "free men of Israel" were seriously perturbed in their minds about the whole situation.

However, the Bible is not interested in Korah's motives and suggests none. In this, perhaps, we might be wise to follow its noble lead. All that really matters to us to-day is that Korah and his fellow-chiefs headed one of the first movements for rebellion in recorded history. If we judge them not by any fancied or imputed motives but by their published statement and programme, as so fairly stated in the Bible, they deserve some meed of praise at our hands instead of the unmixed condemnation they have generally received. It is not enough to say that because they dared to set themselves up against the great Moses and called his policy in question, they should therefore be condemned outright. Moses was not infallible, and his name is not sacrosanct. And Aaron, as we know, had already been reproved for foolish and ruinous religious practices that had endangered the spiritual life of the people. The fact that this large and influential body of chiefs and Levites opposed the policy of Moses and Aaron should only lead us to examine their statements without bias. At least we may be sure that the mere fact of their rebellion does not prove them evil and vicious men.

What were the ground of Korah's rebellion? His own words, as given in the Bible, supply us with his official complaint.

His charge is twofold. He complains (he or others with whom he is merged in the story) that Moses "takes too much on him," *i.e.,* assumes too much power. In support of this, he asserts as a principle that all men in Israel are equal. There should be equal rights and opportunities for all. Israel wants no "one-man" government. The people are God's free people, equal in all things. Israel is a spiritual republic, and all its people are holy.

His second charge is against the arrogated power of Aaron in his priesthood. He accuses him, in effect, of becoming a "priestling." All Israel is holy, equally holy. There is only one priesthood—the priesthood of all Israel! Every man has an equal right of approach to God. Jehovah is not someone far away, a distant, august potentate who needs to be placated by special functions and ceremonies. Jehovah is here with them, in their midst: and every man, *as priest in his own family,* has equal right and honour with Aaron.

The first is an objection to Moses' temporal power, the second to Aaron's ecclesiastical dominance. Both of the brothers, each in his own sphere, are accused of assuming airs and prerogatives to which they have no title. All the people are equal, and all the people are holy.

There is no doubt, on his programme, apart from any imputed motives, that Korah was the world's first democrat in politics and religion.

III

To my mind there is no doubt that Korah was both wrong and right. At one and the same time he was a fool and yet the wisest man of his day. Indeed, his main fault is that he lived a few thousand years before his time.

In the first place, Korah was wrong.

On the political side he was wrong, because he failed to see that *for that day and in those circumstances* a strong personal ruler like Moses was the only government possible. Israel's disordered and untrained condition demanded this type of autocratic rule, and precluded any approach to a more popular and representative type of government. As we have seen, the people were little more than a loosely-linked mob, with no history, experience, traditions, or unity behind them. Could there be any kind of "popular rule" among an inexperienced rabble like this? Representative or "shared government," such as Korah demanded, would only have been a folly and a weakness among such inchoate units. Israel was not ripe for a mature system that demanded experience, political intelligence, and a corporate mind. Representative government, then and now, (I wish that even we remembered this), demands certain requisites for its success. It demands education and a popular conscience: it demands corporate ideals; and it demands political experience among the electorate. It is all very well to say that people are equal. *But what if they are not equal?* That loosely-knit band of ex-slaves, with no education and no social experience, could no more govern themselves than the aborigines of Australia could govern themselves. People who claim to govern themselves must prepare themselves to govern themselves!

It is a curious fact in history that what we think *a lower form of government* may often be actually better at the time for untrained and uncultured people than what we know to be the *highest* form of government. In the end, nations have only the government they deserve and can appreciate. It would be folly to give a savage and ignorant nation our tested ideal of the British Parliament or the American Congress, and say: "Now, there is the highest form of government: take that, and rule yourselves." We forget that we Anglo-Saxons have worked up painfully to our ideal of government through long evolving processes, through generations of training, through centuries of popular education, and through millions of helpful blunders. To expect that this inarticulate drove of disbanded slaves, with no social mind or political experience, should adopt and *work* any advanced form of popular or shared government, would be only a historic anachronism. People have to be fit and able for their privileges before they can use them!

On the spiritual side, also, Korah was wrong.

If God was to use this people as a unit—a nation among the nations—for His future revelations, there must be a prepared, equipped, and specially educated means available for the reception of His messages. *That means was undoubtedly the official priesthood!* Here, at this moment of crisis, a new departure was taking place in the history of Israel. A nation was being born, to whom definite promises, *as a nation,* had been made. If we can use the artificial word "dispensation" at all, this was the beginning of a new era, when new methods must prevail. Until this moment, down from the patriarchs and right through the long disordered life in Egypt, there had been no "nation" of Israel in any actual sense. God had worked, had almost been forced to work, through individuals, and through individuals alone. But now, the nation, as an idea and a reality, was in the throes of birth. While this did not affect the "priesthood of all Israel," there was, nevertheless, need of a special priesthood *for Israel!* If Jehovah was to speak with Israel as Israel—with the Israel that was now becoming a crystallising unity for the first time—there must be prepared servants whose whole work was for the spiritual well-being, the training, and the teaching of the people, as well as to offer sacrifices for the nation and be God's channel of command and guidance. There is no doubt that a special priesthood, set apart and especially trained, was a spiritual necessity, to act as a medium of God's grace, as teachers of the people, and expounders of the faith.

IV

Thus Korah was wrong, and the events of Providence justly crushed him and set him aside. At this moment, and by the very facts against which he rebelled, there were being evolved in Israel gracious processes in which the spiritual future of the nation was deeply concerned.

But nonetheless, in spite of his historic anachronism, Korah was right. He was so gloriously right that only now are we progressive enough to adopt and honour the two great principles for which he stood and for which he died. In one sense, he was the most farsighted man in ancient history. He dreamed of a state of things that we are only beginning to realise now. He was the first great reformer in politics and religion. His tragedy is not that he died amid the wreck of his splendid dreams, but that he lived and dreamed some thousands of years too early. It may be that what we need to-day is a fresh incarnation of Korah, one who will stand up and proclaim with new power the principles for which his own age was politically and spiritually unready.

First of all, we need Korah's statement of the essential equality of all souls in religion and in the sight of God. We need a fresh statement of the native privileges of all men in their right of approach to God. We have become so used to the thought of vicarious priesthood, (which takes its origin here in Aaron's assumption of common privileges as his own prerogative), that we forget these common privileges themselves, out of which the priesthood is only a natural evolution.

It is very interesting to notice the beginnings of official Hebrew priesthood as revealed in this incident. We know that in earlier days Aaron was equal, and regarded himself only as equal, with all the others in Israel. Each father in his own family was the one and only priest. Abraham, we remember, was the priest in his own home—as also were Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and indeed every Hebrew father. Of this historical fact there can be no possible doubt.

But at this moment we see the stealthy beginning of the new process. We see how Aaron begins to take up special privileges and functions into his own hands. This development was fully justified by the increasing complexity of national life and by the religious needs of the people: and as we know, God's providence used and blessed it fully for His purposes of grace. Nonetheless, we must be more than blind if we do not see how the process began historically. In the first instance, it began by the Levites *as a class* receiving certain priestly rights over other tribes and classes. Here we have the second stage, where Aaron, from among the Levites, receives special prerogatives over and above them. Thus, Korah, himself a Levite, represents the revolt of *the whole class of Levites against one particular Levite,* Aaron, who exalts his own privileges and the privileges of his family above those of his own order.

In the beginning, therefore, Aaron was equal with his brethren: and all Israel (in Korah's fine phrase) was holy. But from now on the process of differentiation becomes rapid and fixed. More and more, rights and privileges, once common to all the people, are gathered up into individual hands. To us there might be no ground of complaint in this process, for we believe that it is a process both natural and divine. The life of any complex social group must be specialised! But if we are to understand this revolt of Korah, we must think ourselves back into his position, in some historical sympathy. What did he and his fellow rebels see? They saw the common sacred rights of priesthood being gathered into Aaron's hands, and they could easily forecast the future. We know that in the insolence of prideful men that forecast was more than fulfilled. For, bit by bit, the Jewish priesthood was built up in its hedged privileges, until it became the common idea in later days that no one had either the right or the power to approach God except the official priest! We can follow the slow but amazing growth of this priestly power right through the history of Israel, one snatched right leading to another snatched right, until when the Lord Jesus Christ came, He found the priesthood in dominant power, with the common people (once equal and equally holy) unable to approach God except through the medium and by the pleasure of the priests. And when our Lord preached this very doctrine of Korah, (the equal priesthood of all believers, the right of simple hearts to approach God, and the immediate forgiveness of sins through a soul's saving faith), these Jewish priests, entrenched at last in their pilfered privileges, were so strong that they took Him to Calvary and nailed Him to a cross. . . . All that, though of course he did not see it, lay in Korah's forecast.

The process that thus culminated in Israel's supreme disaster began here. It began literally in this day of small beginnings, when Korah's valiant protest was smothered in defeat. We have faith enough to know that his defeat lay in God's providence. But we have also faith enough to believe that many a dream, which He may set aside through the unripeness of the times and the obstinate dullness of men, may yet live to flourish as *the higher truth* when the eyes of men are opened!

Why should we not say, therefore, in the light of

Christ's full revelation, that Korah's contention that all Israel was equally holy, and that all men were equally God's children, has at last been gloriously vindicated. If so, even though they were defeated and discredited, we may hail Korah and his friends as the heroes of a great lost cause which God in His own good time has at last established. Dimly, fumblingly, but instinctively, they saw a truth, and died for a truth, that was not made real until the Lord came and gave believers equal rights with God.

In a true sense, Korah's tragedy is this, that he lived some thousands of years too early!

V

The second principle for which Korah and his party contended is the great political doctrine of "shared government" among people who are fit and qualified. This political aspect of the rebellion must have been the prominent idea in the minds of the 250 princes of the assembly "famous in the congregation, men of renown." These men, as we gather, were not Levites, like Korah, their nominal leader, to whom perhaps the spiritual problem of the priesthood was naturally foremost. To them, however, *as laymen,* the political aspect of Moses' assumption of power was most prominent. Here is the full statement of their case, by their spokesman Korah, as against the growing temporal claim of Moses: "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?"

This is a reasoned protest against the personal rule which, as we saw, Moses was almost forced to adopt. The pressure of circumstances and the needs of the people drove him into his position of prominence. We know that this personal rule was a gain to Israel, and was, perhaps, the only kind of government for which the people were fitted. But while we may fully admit that with a man of such genius and character as Moses the gain far outweighed the loss, we must also be fair enough to admit that there were serious *principles* involved quite apart from the unique personality of the man who acted as a wise and gracious dictator.

Moreover, it is not fair to assert that the root of revolt lay solely in mean envy and jealousy. No doubt, Korah and his friends (some of them at least) may have been ungenerous to the great hero who had led them so triumphantly from the bondage of Egypt. No doubt, also, there may have been personal annoyance and anger in their minds against this "strong man." But even if that be admitted, it does not affect the fact that they deliberately based their whole case on *reason,* and argued from the innate equality in which every Israelite stood in the sight of God.

The modern value of their ancient rebellion lies in the fact that they stated their case for some broader and more representative government on the *rights of man* and our *equality in God's sight.* Perhaps, as we have already allowed, a more responsible type of government was not possible in those difficult days. But I love to judge Korah by the remembrance that he rebelled and died for a dream which is now our most precious possession to-day. Nothing alters this fact, no matter what dubious motives we may attribute to him.

It cannot be denied that Korah and his party had a glimpse of bigger and better things. We must be chary of reading any of our modern ideas into their words, or making them out to be men with advanced views of "representative" government. But nonetheless, they stated principles of equality and human privilege in which we may well exult. The strong personal rule of Moses, under God's providence, was doubtless the "relative best" for the Israelites in the stage of development in which they were. But ideally, the rebels stated principles of equality and responsibility in government that were generations ahead of their age. Personally, in my own love of public liberties, and in my trust of the public mind, even though cursed by countless public blunders, I would rather fail with Korah than succeed with Moses. By that I mean, not that Korah can ever be compared with Moses, but that I would rather be badly ruled by a responsible government than be excellently ruled by a dictator!

I smile sometimes when I remember how we preen ourselves on the idea that responsible government is an Anglo-Saxon idea, and therefore our own peculiar preserve. I admit that we have worked it out as a great feasible and practical scheme. But literally, we have the principle of it here in the great programme of Korah. Here is the germ from which the full organism has grown. Sometimes, also, we praise John Calvin for his dream of "parity" in Church Government, say, in my own Presbyterian Church, on whose constitution, I understand, the United States modelled its great conception of what a free Republic should be. But we have it all here, in its originating principle at least, in Korah's immortal slogan that all Israel is *holy,* and *free,* and *equal.*

Korah died in disaster. But the principles for which he died will live for ever. He is not the first man, perhaps, who has died for living out of his own generation. Though we admit gladly that in the providence of God Moses' personal rule and Aaron's priesthood were the one means, in their own special circumstances, to bring Israel to greatness, we also know that no nation will reach the highest greatness without the principles of Korah!

This then is his tragedy, that he lived centuries before his true time.

A DISCHARGE FOR BALAAM

If we collate the stray references to the name "Balaam" which are scattered throughout the Bible, the owner of the name becomes, beyond even a man like Judas, the prime puzzle of all literature. How could he be what he was and yet become what he became? Psychologists have found one of their happiest hunting-grounds in the apparent enigma of this man's life. More than any other character, he seems to have touched the highest and dredged the lowest—at one moment peeping into the half-open doors of Heaven, and yet at the end pulling behind his retreating back the clanging gates of Hell.

When he first appears in Scripture, in that amazing drama of the blessing of Israel, he undoubtedly represents, in vision and character alike, the highest and best that the ancient world knew—so high, indeed, that though a "foreigner," he overtops in spiritual apprehension the Hebrew prophets of his generation. If we judge him entirely by the early scene in the Book of Numbers, he has a majesty of character, a singleness of mind, and a grandeur of faith that would adorn any age. His communion with God, his resolute dependence on Jehovah's will, and his unimpeachable integrity are our continual admiration. Nobility, dignity, fearlessness, spiritual insight, honour, and an incorruptible heart are the plain marks of his character. Best of all, these qualities of his public life are based on so intimate a view of the mind of God and so clear a vision of spiritual duty that we stand amazed at such a man in such an age.

Yet at the end, according to later accounts of the man, he seems to touch slimy bottoms of evil and pollution, depths of obliquity, subtleties of devilry, greater than many professed scoundrels have ever reached. His fall, let us notice, is not the forgivable and understandable sin of personal indulgence, where a fierce temptation leaps upon a man unawares, or swirls through his life like a sudden gust. His sin, rather, is the deliberate, cold, devilish sin that *feeds on the sins of others* and sucks blood like a vampire. He snares the people of God into harlotries of faith and life in order that God may forsake and disown them. Thus, perhaps, they may be cursed at last to Balaam's gain! In this perversion, therefore, he is the messenger of Satan himself, seducing innocence and polluting men's souls for the profit of his purse. The puzzle of the enigma lies in this—that the man who thus battens on poisoned souls is he who once said with resolute honor, *"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."* And the man who at the end lies slaughtered for his shame with his fellow-panderers is he who once offered that greatest human prayer, quoted as often as any other prayer of man, *"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."*

Surely this is the *Mystery* of Iniquity!

All this has been so amazing and so shocking to our moral sense as to be almost unbelievable. It seemed a second fall of Lucifer. The possibilities of human degeneration and moral topsy-turvydom revealed in the story made us dreadfully afraid. We wondered whether the man's early goodness was only a pious deceit, perhaps that most dreadful deceit of all, a self-deceit. If so, (and this made us shudder), was it possible that a hypocrite could utter blandly these great expressions of spiritual truth, which have so nobly enshrined some of man's immemorial longings? Might not all expressions of religious truth be equally hollow and insincere? Or if his sentiments were originally honest and truthful, what other gaping chasms were opened at our feet? Was it possible for human degeneracy to be so sudden and desolating? Could a soul that once knew God so intimately become, in Tennyson's phrase, "procuress to the lords of Hell?" Whichever way we looked, our souls were shaken—this former Ambassador of Gods the Apostle of the Pit!

In itself, of course, we know that there is nothing essentially unbelievable in this. Anyone with experience of the human heart knows that its glory lies in its amazing possibilities. *"Then I saw,"* says Bunyan, *"that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven."* Besides, if the very good may fall, the very evil may rise! That the world has had its Judas, its Simon Magus, its Francis Bacon, prepares us for the possibilities of spiritual declension and moral perversion among the best. It is only too possible for a good man to fall—if he ceases to be good! Moreover, there is no fall so great or so desolating as a fall from the steps of Heaven.

I

In view of the general interest in the problem of Balaam, it is only fitting to notice that from the Bible's point of view, the one person who does not matter in the story of Balaam is Balaam himself. Indeed, the last thing in which the Book is interested is a "character study" of this man. Balaam, literally, is an accident. He is only a chance person caught up for the moment in big events whose course he can do nothing to alter. He is of so little moment that any other man of a thousand might have taken his place without changing the plan or affecting the result. If this remark seems foolish to us, (as foolish, say, as the attempt to play *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark), a little reflection will show us its truth.

Balaam was an accident in this sense, that the only thing that really mattered in this ancient drama was the opposition of the two great forces of Israel and Moab. These forces represented, on the one hand, *the people who stood for God,* however imperfectly, however foolishly, however sinfully; and on the other hand, *the people who opposed God* and stood for false and lower things. That opposition, one of eternal principles, was all that mattered to the sacred writer. Balaam was a chance intrusion into this historic struggle, which represented not only itself but also the ceaseless clash between good and evil, God and the world. The prophet could have influenced this ageless contest in no effective way. Indeed, he is introduced to show just how little anyone can do against the will of God! Would it have mattered an iota whether he blessed or cursed Israel? This alone was final—*that Israel in the last resort stood for God, and Moab for the world.* A hundred Balaams could not have affected the result or stayed the march of God's will.

If we care, we may take this as an allegory. How tremendously interested we are in persons, whereas the only things that matter in this world are principles and causes! Some of us came to feel this during the Great War. We talked and speculated about people, as if the great questions at stake depended on certain personalities. The Prime Minister of one nation, the General of another, or the President of a third! But all that ever mattered during these dreadful years was this recrudescence of the old struggle between two opposing principles, beside which individuals and what they could do counted for next to nothing. We might have dispensed with all these people during the war, and the great cause would have thrown up others.

In precisely this way, Balaam was an accident. He was a chance man who stood for a moment in the reflected light of a struggle which his own private conduct could not permanently affect. In spite of him, or anything he could do, the Will of God passed on. He himself, in himself, mattered next to nothing.

Thus, the last thing in which the Bible is interested is a character study of Balaam. Yet curiously enough, this seems to be our main interest to-day. People have forgotten this momentous juxtaposition of Israel and Moab—which is one of the great moments of history, almost like Christ facing Annas—and have written tomes about this man, analysing his acts, his motives, his words, and his thoughts, as if the story had been told to portray his character. Whereas, Balaam only finds a place in the tale to show this one thing—that what the Lord blesses, he blesses, and what the Lord curses, he curses! With Balaam or without Balaam, the will of God runs on.

Thus by a strange perversion, the "accident" in this drama has become the main plot—as if the Ghost in *Hamlet* should usurp the chief part! Indeed, there has been more written about Balaam, in analysis of his character and motives, than about any of the other casual people of the Bible. Writers have worried over the "moral puzzle" of his conduct and the apparent inconsistences and contradictions of his character, and have not seen that the Bible is not really interested in the man at all!

Balaam and Pilate are alike in this particular, that once they have played their dramatic parts in the settlement of the eternal causes between which they stand, the Bible has no further concern with them. Certainly, it is not really interested in the *character* of either of these two men. In the end, it dismisses them both with a superb unconcern. At the close of Balaam's story, for instance, there is this single summary phrase, "Balaam rose up, and went, and returned to his place." That is all that the Scripture cares ultimately about Balaam. For one dazzling hour, (such is his immortality), he stood in the arena of the eternal struggle between Israel and Moab, truth and error, the spirit and the flesh, Jehovah and the half-gods.

II

Nonetheless, this man is an unending source of speculative and psychological interest to students of human character. As we read the full references to him in the Bible (Numbers xxii.-xxiv.; xxxi.; Deuteronomy xxiii. 4; Joshua xiii. 22; xxiv. 9-10; Micah vi. 5, with scattered references in the New Testament, 2 Peter ii. 15; Jude verse 11; Revelation ii. 14) we realise that he is literally the moral puzzle of the Bible! His good and his evil are alike astonishing, and the height of the one is only equalled by the depth of the other. How is it possible for a man to be an angel of light and an angel of darkness? Learned psychologists have tried to resolve the difficulty by all kinds of arguments, parallels, and analogies. But nonetheless, Balaam has remained the supreme spiritual riddle.

The ethical puzzle of his character, which so engaged the moral casuists and gave such room for psychological ingenuity, has been finally resolved for us in a startling way. A fresh and impartial study of the facts of Scripture has solved the problem for good. *From the plain statements of the narratives themselves* there can be no doubt that the Bible tells us of two men called Balaam, whom later generations have confounded or identified. This fact lay evident in the records to be seen by any inquiring mind. Because it has been missed, the great Balaam of Pethor has suffered from the contempt of the centuries and has borne the sins and the slander of another. The moral problem is solved at last by showing that it does not exist!

Let us look at the Bible's own statements regarding this matter.

The great Prophet Balaam, who figures so notably in Numbers xxii.-xxiv. and of whom the wonderful story of the blessing and cursing is told, comes from *Pethor on the River Euphrates* (identified with *Pitru,* mentioned by Shalmaneser II). He is acknowledged to be a distinguished prophet of high record who knows, honours, and worships Jehovah as his only inspiration. He is brought from his far home in Mesopotamia by the messengers of Balak of Moab to curse Israel and throw a blight upon them, thus staying their advance and growth. But he refuses to do so, again and again, because he discovers that to blight Israel does not lie in God's will. That will is alone supreme in Balaam's mind. At the end of the great and dramatic scene, so pictorially described in the Bible, the record dismisses this noble prophet by saying, *"Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way."* There is no doubt that this means Balaam's final departure. The great episode, in which he had taken so notable a part, is now definitely closed. This is made more certain, if possible, by Balaam's own words in the last scene where he gives his farewell blessing to Israel, *"And now, behold, I go unto my own people."* It is quite plain from the narrative that Balaam and Balak separated, and each went to his own land, Balaam certainly to distant Pethor on the Euphrates where he had his home and friends and interests. This is the last we hear of Balaam of Pethor!

But the second Balaam with whom this noble soul has been confused, (the name must have been fairly common, as an ordinary compound of Bel, Be-el or Baal, meaning Lord), is described in Joshua and elsewhere as merely a "soothsayer" or oracle-monger. It is definitely said that he lived among the Midianites, adjoining Israel, and was a devotee of the foul religion of Moab. This soothsayer, by his evil influence, perverted the Israelites and led them into the lascivious worship of *Chemosh,* "the abomination of Moab," whose degrading ritual was both brutal and harlotrous. This Midianite priest hoped that the people might thereby incur the anger and punishment of Jehovah, who might then disown them for their evil. So he laid traps for the men of Israel and led them into idolatry and shame. In the end, when Moses rose up in fury and punished the

Midianite and Moabite host, we are told that this Balaam, the "soothsayer," was slain ingloriously with his fellow-princes. His death was the punishment of his shame and his hatred of Jehovah.

Now it is quite evident from the facts that the Bible tells us of two quite distinct people—one, a noted righteous prophet, a native of distant Mesopotamia, who knew and served the Lord Jehovah with particular fidelity, and worshipped him sincerely, who indeed would do nothing that in any way conflicted with God's will, and who at the close of the great incident of the Blessing of Israel returned openly and definitely to his own home and "his own people"; and second, a soothsayer or oracle-monger of the Midianites who hated Israel and tempted it to folly, who worshipped the brutal and immoral God *Chemosh,* and was slaughtered by the army of Moses when they punished Moab and Midian for perverting the morals of Israel.

It is true that in certain places this Midianite Balaam is described in the same phrase "son of Beor" as is used of Balaam of Pethor. But that is only a mark of the later identification of the two men. In other places, say in Moses' speech (Numbers xxxi. 16), the Midianite is simply called Balaam. It is obvious that the later copyists, confounding the two men, added the usual Hebrew phrase "son of ——," which identified a man by his parentage. But as often as not, he is simply called Balaam, and it is obvious that the erroneous title "son of Beor" has been added, in certain places, through the later confusion of the two names.

It is frankly impossible that the great and honourable Balaam could have returned to his own land and his own people (as the Bible definitely asserts) and yet could have been back within a short time among the Midianites, that roving Ishmael tribe, with whom he had no relations and nothing in common! But the greatest impossibility is not merely physical or geographical, but moral and spiritual—that the Balaam to whom the Lord Jehovah was so vividly real, and to whom God's slightest whisper was as law, could have changed within so short a time into *a decadent worshipper of the immoral and ribald Chemosh, the enemy of Jehovah!*

The fault lies with later writers in confounding the two men through the chance identity of their names. By attributing the sins and shame of the one to the other they created their own moral puzzle! But the "moral puzzle" is unreal: for the early records of the Bible are quite clear and definite in showing that the two men are indeed *two men!*

It may seem a pity to deprive the "dogs of criticism" of this meaty bone. Many people may feel that they have been robbed of a fascinating psychological study. But the facts, as stated, are given in the Bible and must be faced.

III

Thus the great Balaam of Pethor, from the ancient land of Abraham, has been gravely slandered by the world's blunder in misreading the facts of the case. There is no doubt that his honour and his memory have suffered from the borrowed sins of his namesake. I hope that in his distant grave in Mesopotamia he now sleeps well.

It is our duty, therefore, as Christian people, to rehabilitate the true Balaam and grant him a discharge from the world's calumnies. The story told of this Chaldean prophet in Numbers xxii.-xxiv. must therefore be read afresh, without the ancient defaming bias that has come from the sordid story of Balaam of the Midianites, the devotee of the obscene Chemosh.

I have no doubt that some of the mud that has been flung at this good prophet by the later Hebrews was thrown of purpose. What the later Hebrews, their priests especially, could not understand, and what perhaps led them so easily to confound the two men, was the remarkable fact that this great and honourable prophet was outside the Hebrew nation! They could not believe that their own early narratives could be so impartial as to picture such a noted prophet, who knew and worshipped Jehovah with such fidelity, as outside the covenant nation of God's mercies! It was incredible to them that the God of the Hebrews could deliver some of His most precious messages through a "rank outsider." Hence they were only too eager to identify the Balaam of Chaldea with his namesake of Midian, and show that his great truths, which they could not contradict, were nevertheless contradicted by his open sins. But the Bible is always bigger than those who handle it. It, at least, reveals unmistakably that the true Balaam from the River Euphrates is one of the great souls of God.

The story of Balaam of Pethor is beautifully and dramatically told in the records. He is a man whose fame as an inspired prophet of Jehovah had travelled wide and far. The traders on the great caravan routes, who were the "press" of their day, spread the knowledge of his power and insight over the East and West. Balak, the King of Moab, in deadly fear of the advancing Israelites, who had come like a hot wind from the Arabian desert, remembered this man's repute, and bethought him that he might hire his services to blast these impudent invaders. We, who so lately believed in the blight of the "evil eye" or a witch's curse, need not smile at this ancient credulity. What is worth noting, however, is the pathetic belief that only a good and sincere man could command a genuine blight. The curses of evil men were innocuous and ineffective—perhaps because they were so common! This in itself is an indirect testimony to Balaam's reputation for sincerity. The curse must be given in a "pure" passion, in a kind of holy (or unholy) sacrament. It is only of a sincere man, for instance, that one could say in Balak's words, "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."

Looking down from his hills on the spreading Israelites, the King of Moab resolved to hire the famous Balaam to blight his enemies before he began hostile operations. So he sent a deputation of the chief men of Moab and Midian with costly presents to induce the prophet to come to his aid. We know how they fared. When they laid their plea before Balaam, he answered at once that he must first find the will of Jehovah. "*And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.*" Thereupon, (let us note this), without any parleying or even any apology, Balaam replied straightly to the princes of Balak, "Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." Nothing could be more honest, even bluntly honest, than this. God had spoken to his soul: and that was enough. (Notice, by the way, that he tells the elders of Midian to return to *their own land,* showing that this cannot possibly be the Balaam who lived in Midian and served their national God.)

The very honesty and brusqueness of this man made Balak only the more anxious to command his services. This was indeed the kind of "holy man" whose honest malediction would blight his foes! Believing, like Walpole, that every man has his price, he prepared a more honourable deputation of princes, with more enticing gifts, and dispatched them again to Mesopotamia, urging Balaam to come to his aid. The princes told the prophet of the great honours and wealth he would receive if only he would consent to Moab's plea. Balaam's answer to their allurements is one of the finest statements of an incorruptible heart. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." Is there anything that could be more direct and honourable than this? Yet under the influence of the old belief that this man was also the Balaam who was afterwards found among the Midianites, many commentators sneer at his words and discredit his honesty. Robertson of Brighton, for instance, likens him to a vulgar man who protests his honesty too much. Honourable people, he remarks, do not need to pledge their honour so publicly or ostentatiously! But if only we get rid of the clinging odour of the other Balaam, would one ever think of calling this man's honesty in question? His reply is not only the direct answer of a direct man, but also the justly annoyed answer of a good man who objects to the evident suggestion of bribery! A true prophet may be paid, but he has no "price!"

Under the pressure of this new demand, however, he consented once more to find the will of Jehovah.

Still biased by old prejudices, many writers ask why he thought that God could change so easily? Had he not received a definite answer before? Was he fumbling for an excuse to go to Balak that he might earn the big dangling bait? But if we put ourselves in his place for a moment, we may be less harsh and unjust. Long months must have passed since the previous visit: and there is such a thing as "new light." God's will for a man's life does change, as new circumstances and new emphases call for new decisions. Balaam was only the more truly religious that he was ready, as each new call arose, to seek Divine guidance.

At this point, we must frankly admit that the narrative gives two versions of the Divine answer Balaam received. In the first account (Numbers xxii. 20) he is plainly told to rise up and go with the men, but to speak only the word that God shall give him. In the morning, he leaves *accompanied by the "princes of Moab"* (v. 21). In the second account he apparently agrees to go *against* the will of Jehovah, and leaves *accompanied only by his "two servants."* (It is in this second account that the strange incident of the ass finds its place.) We cannot reconcile the discrepancy between these two accounts except by acknowledging that we have two mingled versions, one earlier and one later, of this part of the story. It is quite easy for us to know which is the earlier, for all the later accounts of Balaam, under Hebrew prejudice, have sought to disparage this great non-Hebrew prophet, who knew and served Jehovah so faithfully. There can be no doubt that the earlier account of Balaam—and the more trustworthy—was the more kindly and favourable. He went in the will of God, but only to do the will of God!

By this early version, then, Balaam receives distinct permission to go to Balak, but he is charged to speak only the word that God shall give him. He leaves under the protection and guidance of the princes, and sets out on his long desert journey. If we read all that he said and did on his arrival, without bias, we shall find that he never for a moment departed from his allegiance to the will of God and his pledge to be honest.

When he arrives at length at the court of Moab, the great Balak who, like all his breed, imagines that a man's scruples are only a disguised bid for more money, chides him indignantly for his dalliance in coming. Balaam's noble answer is the key to the whole story. *"Have I any power to say anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak."* This is the attitude he assumes throughout the whole dramatic incident—that he is simply God's servant, only God's servant, and always God's servant. With him the will of God alone is paramount.

We remember how Balak, anxious for the prophet's curse, takes him to one high place after another, where he may look down on the panorama of Israel's encampment, and may blight them with his "winged words." But no inducement of any kind, fear or favour, can turn Balaam from his loyalty to God. In spite of all the promised wealth of Balak, in spite of prayers and reproaches, he pronounces blessing after blessing on Israel, speaking from a full inspiration as effortless as the song of a bird. When Balak remonstrates with him for his acts, this is the only answer Balaam deigns to make: *"Told I not thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh, that I* *must do?"* Urged again and again by the passion of entreaty, he offers sacrifices to God and seeks His will. But always, as the servant obedient to the vision, he blesses the people of God. That he is represented as seeking the Divine Will *three times* in sacrifice is not told in the story to reveal any uncertainty on Balaam's part or any desire to coax or cajole God into his own way of thinking, but only to show how *fixed* God is in His plan to use and bless Israel! God's will for Israel's blessing and destiny is sure. If only His servants will seek Him with a pure heart, like Balaam, His will shall be made known.

At the end, quoting the very words he had spoken to the early messengers, Balaam turned to the King and said, "Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak? And now, behold, I go to mine own people. Come, I will show thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days." Then, afraid of no one except God, in one final burst of religious prophecy, he spoke poems and parables revealing Israel's destiny in the world.

He is actually represented as being one of the first, in or out of Israel, to speak of the ideal kingdom of the future Israel:—

"I shall see him, but not now:
I shall behold him, but not nigh:
There shall come a Star out of Jacob,
And a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

The record closes the great scene of this incorruptible man's triumph by the simple but final sentence, *"And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way."* Thus ends the magnificent story of *Balaam of Pethor,* the true, honourable, and perfectly inspired servant of the Lord Jehovah, to whom the Divine Will, first and last, is everything.

IV

I am convinced that every charge against this man's spiritual honour and moral honesty is groundless. The identification of the true Balaam with the Midianite soothsayer, the priest of the lascivious and obscene *Chemosh,* has led people to read into this matchless story some most unwarrantable suspicions. Believing that the two men and the two stories are one, critics have naturally sought to find the "cloven hoof" of the Midianite Balaam in this incident. For instance, it is presumed that there must be traces of *greed* here, since the other man sinned for greed! But if we blot out the Midianite from our thoughts, where is there the slightest suggestion that this man was willing to depart from truth or deny his faith for all the silver and gold that Balak could heap on his chariot? In fact, the one thing that will *not* tempt the prophet to deviate from the truth is money! Again and again, this is his one question *"What is the will of God for me?"* "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?" To believe that this God-directed man, within a few months, could stoop to adore the unholy Chemosh, and then plan to snare Israel into vice so that God might allow him to curse the people and so obtain Balak's fold, is asking us to believe the impossible! Besides, it is asking us to overlook the

Bible's plain assertion that Balaam of Pethor, at the close of the drama, returned to his own land and his own people!

The old riddle of Balaam does not exist. It certainly does not exist if we read the narrative aright. There is no longer any need for us to speculate how such amazing goodness could become such amazing pollution. The only answer is—*it did not*. Balaam of Pethor remains an untarnished knight to the end of the chapter. He shines in the Scripture as a man of singular honour and rectitude of life, incorruptibility of mind, and fearlessness of heart—and all because his communion with God was so immediate, so full, and so natural. He is one of the great prophets in the Old Testament. It is to the glory of the early records that they pictured him as such, though he was outside the people of God's covenant mercies.

Balaam's character throughout this dramatic adventure on the hills of Moab is consistently strong and beautiful. In the first place, he is represented as being always and only *a clear channel of God's Will*. He does not obstruct the Will: he does not question it: he does not dilute it. "What God speaks to me," he says in effect, "that I tell you, no more, no less." What wonderful views he has of Jehovah's character and his own duty—altogether beyond the ideas of his own age, even in favoured Israel!

"God is not a man, that he should lie;
Neither the Son of Man, that he should repent:
Hath he said, and shall he not do it?
Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?
Behold, I have received commandment to bless:
And he hath blessed;
And I cannot reverse it."

That one golden sentence, *"I cannot reverse it,"* is the motto of his story and the key of his own spiritual life. Is there any other early prophet in the Old Testament who is shown as so consistently and immovably true to Jehovah and so much under the reign of His immediate inspiration?

From that, a fair critic must notice his *personal fidelity and fearlessness.* He does not truckle to his mighty employer, and does not fawn as a place-loving courtier. Indeed, if we look at one of his great expressions of faith in a proper spirit, (that is, unprejudiced by thoughts of the Balaam of the Midianites), we shall see that he is even ready to die for his beliefs and his honour. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" This is one of the great expressions in history of a good man's fearless honour.

Further, we must admit that though Israel and Moab, as *nations,* were equally indifferent to him, yet none of the repeated inducements of wealth and favour could move him from loyalty to God's message. It is quite idle, and biased, to say that he had a greedy or covetous mind. There is no doubt, (we can all understand this), that he would naturally have liked to aid and please his employer, and thus earn his hire as a prophet in accordance with the views of his day. *But that fact only makes his consistent refusal the nobler!* The predisposition to favour Moab was present in his thoughts and in his gratitude. But not even this, nor his loss of wealth, nor public disfavour could turn him from his function as a genuine prophet of Jehovah.

Abraham the Faithful, long, long years ago, had come out of the same land and had found Jehovah there. Like Abraham, Balaam was faithful to the light of the Lord he loved. In the end, penniless and publicly despised, he returned to Mesopotamia, having lost everything except God and his own honour. To accuse this man of *greed* or covetousness, in face of the facts of the story, is only to play with words and with truth.

Further, we cannot any longer count him the "Demas" of the Old Testament, the prize apostate of early days. He did *not* fall from his faith, and he did *not* tempt Israel to sin. It is a spiritual impossibility that this man of unimpeachable honour and resolute belief in God could fall, within a few months, into such moral degradation as the religion of *Chemosh* represented. There are things in our human life that are spiritually and ethically impossible, unless we are prepared to sneer at religious faith and laugh at God. And among these, (apart altogether from the facts of the Bible about Balaam of Pethor and Balaam of Midian), is the thought that this man of singular honour and living communion with God could fall so suddenly into the lowest form of pagan pollution. I had sooner believe that there are no laws of the physical world than that there are no laws of spiritual life and grace!

Thus there is no "problem of Balaam" for our psychologists to explicate—unless it be the equally amazing problem of understanding how such a noble man could live in such a day, and how God can make weak human flesh reflect His own grandeur!

Balaam, from the great river that nurtured Abraham, is one of the heroes of the Old Testament. Later Jews, who in their passionate exclusiveness considered Jehovah their own private preserve, did not relish the idea that their Scriptures painted such a hero as springing from a people whom they counted "unenlightened pagans." They were only too glad therefore to identify him with the low conjurer who pandered to the obscenities of the god of the Moabites. Surely it is our duty, in the light of the Bible itself, to rescue this man from an undeserved shame and contempt? Even his great scene of renunciation has been sadly coloured by our prejudice against his namesake. He has been the most misunderstood and most slandered man in history—so much so that the "Sin of Balaam" is denounced in the Revelation as the last iniquity. It *is* the last iniquity—but *it is not the iniquity of Balaam of Pethor!*

Our Balaam is a great white soul who loved the will of God to his own worldly loss. He returned to his own people with his hands empty and his heart full. Whatever he lost, he kept his Lord.

Rest well in Abraham's land, thou man of Abraham's faith!

AN APPEAL FOR SAUL

SAUL, the giant King of Israel, is the supremely tragic figure of the Old Testament. He might fitly take his place as a "buskined figure of doom" in a Greek tragedy of Sophocles or Euripides. He is the typical Hebrew *Œdipus,* fighting not only against man and the events of fortune, but against his own destiny, the rejection of man and God, outward circumstance and inward malady, and the iron hand of Fate. Throughout his life, as with the heroes of Æschylus, the furies seem to pursue him, within and without, marking him down relentlessly for their own. The long shadow of forecasted rejection falls early aslant his path, so that when he lies prone among his fallen sons on Mount Gilboa, the climax of disaster seems the inevitable and fitting end of a Greek drama.

In his melancholy and frenzy, too, (which the ancients considered a particular "affliction of the gods"), we have the same classical note of awesomeness. "Those whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad!" Then later, when he steals by night to the Sibyl in his mental distress, as the Greek heroes consulted their ambiguous oracles, there are the same mysterious intimations of an oncoming, even a self-commanded, doom that nothing can avert. At the end, like a true figure of tragedy, he enters into his last fight for Israel with the depression of his own sure fate upon him and the malediction of the "ghostly visitor" ringing in his ears, yet playing the man in a final desperate defiance. And as he falls on his great sword, rather than be the sport and taunt of Philistine mockers, he is the one real *Greek* in Hebrew history. It is, indeed, a "classical" curtain of doom.

The hapless Samson alone might rival him in this garb of essential tragedy were it not that in Samson's story there is more than a flavour of the ludicrous, the "simple," and the bizarre that makes his end seem less tragic than pitiful. Samson was too much the irresponsible, boisterous "child-man" to make us feel the dolour of his end, except as a scene of inordinate pity, where there is more pathos than tragedy; and in his misfortunes, which are so much the fruit of his own follies, there is certainly no echo of the pattering feet of doom.

In the true classical meaning of the term, Saul is the outstanding tragic figure of the Old Testament. From the moment when Samuel, his early sponsor, breaks with him in the first years of his reign, the dogs of Fate are on his scent. The very Decrees of Providence, buttered by the prophet in his sentence of rejection, are fighting against him. From the beginning, as if a Greek chorus chanted its comments of inescapable doom, we feel that his heroic struggle is sure to be vain. Can there be any other end than defeat from this invincible union of human and divine powers arrayed against him? Thus he is the typical "marked" man of Greek tragedy whom everything conspires to defeat—his enemies and his children alike, outward environment and inward malady, his own tribes and his country's foes, the hand of man and the hand of God, and not the least of all, his own character in its mingled strength and weakness. Nowhere else in the Old Testament do we find so poignantly this true Greek idea of Destiny—that the end lay inevitably in the beginning.

This sense of the King's "unavailing endeavour" is only heightened by the marked contrast of the opening and close of his reign. Is there any lovelier picture than the dawn of Saul's ingenuous and charming youth? As he steps on the stage of his drama, that big, shy, simple man, so conscious of his own unworthiness and so wholly unambitious for personal honours, is entirely winsome. There is the appeal of a native gallantry in the modest but manly young farmer who goes out in a prosaic search for his father's strayed asses, and romantically stumbles on an unsought crown. The promise, too, of his early days of kingship is very beautiful. He faces his cruel task as an "unwanted deliverer" with a mingled modesty and heroism that win our affection. Yet the clouds gather quickly, so quickly—the smoke of battle, the cloud of disappointment, the pall of rejection, the gloom of passion, the darkness of suspicion, and the mist and miasma of his own sick soul. And when the end comes on that crimson field of Mount Gilboa, where his kingdom of cards seems to lie scattered round his fallen body, we feel as if this were but the expected end, and the dogs of Fate at last had pulled him down. Without accepting its pagan fatalism, one might paraphrase Thomas Hardy's great sentence on *Tess*, "Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Æschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Saul."

It is a mingling of the twin tragedies of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.

I

Saul, the first of the Kings of Israel, is commonly regarded as the greatest failure of them all. His critics may freely admit that many of his successors were worse men and worse rulers, but they always return with unrelieved condemnation to this tragic figure. He is regarded, indeed, as the prince of failures. His early promise seems to make the gloom and disaster of the end only the more startling in its ruin. Did he not leave his people more broken and ruined than he found them? Was not the Philistine heel more firmly planted on their necks?

How common is this popular idea of Saul's failure, and how deep are our strictures on the man himself, is shown very forcibly in Dr A. B. Davidson's lecture on "Saul's Reprobation" in his book *The Called of God.* He says that the throne "was thrust upon him. In God's providence he was put into it, incapable as he was. His very incapacity fitted him best for it. For the very glaringness of the failure drew attention to the loftiness of the office. God gave men an idea of what He required by showing how disastrously this king came short of it." Apart from Dr Davidson's dubious theory that God deliberately chose an incapable man to exalt the idea of kingship by his failure, (a fact which, if it were true, would only bring contempt not grandeur to the kingdom), I hope to show in my essay that Saul was one of the most *capable* rulers of Israel, and that so far from being a "glaring failure", he was in God's providence the historical cause of the sure foundation of the monarchy.

In considering the question of Saul's reputed failure, there are many things to be remembered. The first is a general consideration. *Failure, like success, is always relative and comparative.* It is relative, for instance, to the nature of the problem itself, to the normal or average chance of tackling it, to the amount and quality of the opposition to be faced, and to the situation and opportunities of the man himself. Need we be reminded that there are some problems so stupendous and so overwhelming that even failure may be splendid? Certainly, many a splendid failure may be a greater victory than an easy success.

Saul is commonly accused of two types of failure—failure in his outward task, and failure in his inward character. While we may make this distinction legitimately for our own purposes of treatment, we must remember that there are subtle interactions of the one upon the other. A man's character undoubtedly may unfit him for his task: but on the other hand, the magnitude of an adventure may break the strongest and most daring, as a tree is snapped before a hurricane. In estimating a man's failure we must always allow for that chance hurricane!

Let us consider first the kind of task that Saul had to face.

To begin with, he had the stiffest problem of any Hebrew king—*to create a new office.* He had nothing behind him such as later kings had—no helpful traditions of loyalty, fidelity, or political experience among his people, and no public reverence either for himself or his office. His power, in its prerogatives or its limits, was wholly undefined. Whether he had any actual power at his election, other than his own influence, is very questionable. There were no methods of procedure and no executive offices by which he could govern the people and command their services in any crisis. As we gather from the early narratives, he had actually to maintain himself by his own work on his father's farm! As for a *Court,* in any sense of the term, or a consultative Council, there was none. Thus, to sum up his position, he had no defined authority, no trained officials, no material support, no system of taxing or recruiting, no links of communication between the tribes, and no effective army. He had everything to do, with no one to help him to do it.

Further, he had actually a strong party, (and the worst kind of party for bias, a *religious* party), against the very idea of kingship itself. The records show very clearly that this institution of kingship in Israel was mainly an act of political expediency. Influential people, seeing the success of neighbouring nations, demanded a king to lead and unite them. It is easy to see that the religious leaders, headed by Samuel himself, were seriously hostile to this proposal, and fought it strongly on the religious ground that it reflected on the *Kingship of God,* who was the nation's only leader. In the end, Samuel and his party bowed to the people's desire, but even then, it is evident that many were "convinced against their will." Thus we can readily understand the bias and captious criticism of the religious party which Saul had to face, in addition to other difficulties, at the outset of his new, precarious and undefined task.

These difficulties are rather pitifully noticeable at the beginning of his reign. After his choice and crowning, what happened? There was so little place for him among this disordered people, (no court, no official duties, no homage of his subjects, no national functions), that he was forced to return home and resume his simple work as a farmer's son! When the first national danger emerged, where he so nobly distinguished himself, he happened to hear of the trouble by chance. We read that he came in with his horses from ploughing, and heard the people talking of the disaster. In other words, he heard of the event as any other chance person might have heard of it! There was so little recognition of his nominal office that no one thought of appealing to him. That he stepped in through this half-opened door and took up the challenge so nobly, shows that he believed in his calling and took his responsibilities more seriously than those who had chosen him.

II

Further, we can only appreciate his problem when we see the political state of the people whom he was called to govern. What that state was we can best gauge if we take a fairly accurate historical parallel. Saul has suffered in comparison with the achievements of David, much as William Wallace in Scottish history has suffered in comparison with Robert Bruce. It is a common judgment to say that Wallace's work for the freedom of Scotland was spasmodic, aimless, and broken. But Wallace had all the pioneer work to do among a most disordered nation. He had to unite the warring nobles and prod a listless people. He had not only to arouse interest, but create it. It was a lethargic and indifferent nation he had to handle—indeed, not a nation at all, but merely a group of jealous and suspicious clans with little unity, or sense of a great heritage, or "common soul." Unjudging people who estimate success by outward results count Wallace's heroic fight a failure, because of his ignominious death. But we know that he laid the sure foundations on which Robert Bruce built. Without the beheaded Wallace, there might have been no crowned Bruce!

These remarks are true of Saul and David, who are often so foolishly contrasted. We are hypnotised by the glory and success—and the personal charm—of the younger man, who first made Israel a true kingdom and gave it "a place in the sun" among the nations. But, humanly speaking, if we take away the pioneering and cementing work of Saul in disrupted Israel, there would have been no David for us to idealise!

Let us see, then, the state of this people whom Saul was called to rule.

In the first place, to speak of Israel as a "nation" in Saul's time is only a euphemism. At best there was a collection, loosely linked, of bitterly jealous tribes who had little in common except origin, language, and religion. Certainly they had no sense of national consciousness, unity, or common purpose. My own land of Scotland, once more, may not be an unfair parallel. We are one nation now, sensitive—sometimes amusingly sensitive—to national endowment and privilege. But in earlier days, we were merely a land where rival clans existed who hated each other only a little less than they hated "the auld enemy" England! This disunion persisted in Scotland down to the Stuart times. There is little doubt, for instance, that the adventure of "Bonnie Prince Charlie" was ruined not so much by his enemies as by his quarrelling friends. The jealous bickerings of the rival clans and their proud chieftains led Charles to defeat and disaster, and this internal weakness was his greatest enemy.

That state of ancient Scotland, (only worse), was the condition of Israel when Saul became its nominal king. Thus it is evident that to call it a "nation" in our sense of the term is a misnomer. Not one of the links that alone make a nation was there—common ideals, submission to rule other than tribal authority, or sacrifice for the common weal. As for assistance in the task of administration and government, Saul stood in lonely helplessness, as lonely spiritually as he stood in physical stature, head and shoulders over the people.

Further, as with Scotland in the days of Wallace, Israel was a *conquered race.* With their swarming population and their amazing wealth, with their trained armies and the latest war machinery of their age, the Philistines had acquired a stranglehold on the best parts of Israel. They occupied all the fertile regions of Palestine, holding the land by redoubts and garrisons, as the Roman Empire held England against the incursions of the Scots and Picts. Only the barren untracked hills lay out of their sway.

Things were really worse than this outward condition would suggest. The inward or "moral" state of Israel was an even greater problem to a man with patriotic ideals in his heart: and eventually it was that inward state that broke Saul's spirit. For not only were the tribes conquered, but they seemed content to be conquered! They had been under the Philistine yoke so long that many of them could conceive of no other condition. Scotland was never so bad as this for William Wallace, though he, too, had people who only regarded him as an "interfering body!" There is one striking instance of the national passivity of Israel in those early days that always occurs to my mind when I hear people lightly judging the "failure" of young heroic Saul. Earlier than this, when Samson the Judge had tried to free Israel from the foreign yoke and had stirred the angry sting of the enemy, a deputation of chiefs came to him and said, "Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? What is this that thou hast done unto us?" That protest is a flashing comment on Israel's moral state. It hints that the chiefs took this Philistine tyranny for granted! Not only did they admit that the Philistines ruled them, but they even admitted their *right* to rule—as if it were a kind of divine decree. Not that Israel at any time was without its patriots—but what can a patriot do with a supine people?

III

This, (but worse through longer continuance and greater disorganisation), was what faced Saul at the beginning of his reign. Let us try to see his problem in some historical focus.

The only territory possessed by Israel as a free possession at the time of Saul's advent was a few of the hills and glens that the Philistines could not hold —and that only in the south, for the northern tribes were completely cut off by the great plain of Esdraelon, which was easily held by their foes with their horsemen and chariots. With the exception of these inaccessible hills, the rest of the land was firmly in the grip of Philistia, held, as we gather, through linked chains of garrisons to overawe the people and command tribute. The oppression was not too severe, I admit, so long as the tribute was duly paid. The people could live their lives under their own social and religious customs, and perhaps felt themselves safe from other oppressors by being under one! But to claim that Saul had either a united or an enthusiastic people is only to be blind to the facts.

The mastery of the Philistine grip over Israel is shown in that passage which describes the people's military helplessness (1 Samuel xiii. 19-23). We are told that they fought with hooks and forks and axes, for, (a wise piece of strategy from their own angle!), the Philistines had prohibited forges and "smiths" throughout the country. One sure way of keeping Israel peaceful was to prohibit armaments in their midst. We have seen the victors in the late European War apply the same principle in our own day.

The state of this broken Israel is revealed by one impressive detail in Saul's first adventure. Nahash, a chief of Ammon, laid siege to Jabesh-gilead. When the stricken inhabitants offered to surrender, his terms were so bluntly brutal that they amaze us—though they were only typical of the low culture of the age. He demanded that the right eyes of the people should be put out! But the point that impresses us is this. So sure was Nahash of the absolute impotence and indifference of Israel that he scornfully allowed the people of the city to send messengers imploring help from the other tribes. What a contemptuous sneer at Israel's condition that permission implied! This is a most illuminating comment on the Israel of which Saul was the unwanted King.

Many instances might be quoted from the records to show the quality of the "stuff" that Saul had to deal with among his own people. It may be enough to mention one as typical of others. When the Philistines came up against him at Michmash, we read that the greater part of his own raw levies fled in panic and left him with a handful of men to meet the invasion. But even worse than that is the fact that *in his enemy's army* were hundreds of Hebrew auxiliaries who, either from fear, tribal indifference, or love of gold, went out into battle against their King and kinsmen. This fact throws a somewhat lurid light on the Hebrew idea of "nationality" in Saul's age! *Before he could deliver Israel from the Philistines, he had to deliver Israel from itself!* The difference between Saul's problem and David's is that David came to power *after* Saul had delivered Israel from itself, and had made it conscious of its own unity.

There is one thing more, not the least important. Early in his reign, the young patriot had the great misfortune to forfeit the support of the religious party, with Samuel at its head. The prophet had been his sponsor at the beginning of his work; now he became his critic and detractor. We are told, for instance, that he openly declared Saul's rejection, and secretly chose David as his successor. In all honesty, it is very difficult for us to understand *why* Saul was rejected by Samuel. There are two separate reasons assigned in the narrative for this rejection. (It is worth observing that neither of them is dishonourable to Saul!) According to one account, he is accused of sparing the lives of some of the enemy, when Samuel, in a fierce decree, had commanded their extinction. It does not do for us to say that Samuel represented God. It is quite open for us to believe that he misrepresented God! The other reason given for rejection is that on one occasion, before an engagement, when Samuel was gravely delayed beyond his own specified time, Saul offered sacrifice in his absence to supplicate the favour of God. What the King's sin was in this affair is difficult to discover. The original command from the prophet was that he should wait seven days, and this Saul did. As one commentator remarks: "In the circumstances, he might well plead that he had been too scrupulous. It would not be impertinent to ask why Samuel had waited so long before appearing." Further, no one can say that Saul usurped priestly privileges by his act. The offering of sacrifice was a natural function of his office, and no blame can be laid against him on this charge. By all precedent, Saul, as commander, was fully entitled to offer sacrifice before battle. Even in later days, David and Solomon offered sacrifices in this way. To find fault with the King for doing so is only a reflection of later priestly judgment. But reasons apart, the fact remains that this heroic patriot incurred the unsleeping hostility of Samuel and the other prophets, whose opposition added greatly to his oppressive troubles.

IV

That Saul was in no sense a political failure, in spite of these massed difficulties, can be best seen by an examination of the state in which he left Israel. In general summary, we may safely assert that he both *extended* and *consolidated* the kingdom.

First of all, he gradually extended his sway until, as we see in the final battle, he threatened what the Philistines prized most, their caravan and trade routes through the coastal regions and the broad plains of the north. It was actually for these routes that Saul's last great fight was fought. When he fell at Mount Gilboa, he was striking a blow to rid the fertile plains of the Philistine yoke. If he could only do so, he would at last join the South and North in one kingdom. That he had an army up near Mount Gilboa, fighting for such an object as I have mentioned, is the best proof of the success of his reign. The only explanation of why the battle took place so far to the north, away from his own centre of supplies, lies in the fact that he had so extended his kingdom that he was now able to attack his enemies in the main artery of their power.

Moreover, it should be noticed that the last stand of Saul's house under Ishbosheth took place at Mahanaim, on the *eastern* side of the Jordan. This proves how wide his sway had become in his later years. Actually, Israel was already a growing kingdom in his hands, long before David increased its greatness.

But the mere extension of the kingdom was not nearly so important or so far-reaching in its results as his work of *consolidation*. He had created an efficient army, a court of some kind, and executive administration. One short sentence shows his genius for patient consolidation, and also the fascination of his personality: *"When Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him."* But most of all, he had succeeded in the miracle of linking these disordered tribes into some sense of unity, and had organised and harnessed them for common political actions. How well he had established authority in the broken country is seen in one interesting detail. The later part of his reign is described, naturally enough, from the angle of David the coming king; but has it occurred to us how thoroughly, even in this story of David's adventure, Saul was able to drive his rival out of every nook and corner of the land—David, the popular idol, whose magnetism over men was already beginning to show itself? He suspected David of conspiracy, and in his attempts to capture him he chased him successfully out of parts of David's own tribal region! In Scotland, down to a late day, a man was safe in his own clan country, even from the King's men! That Saul could drive David out of his own home parts and force him to seek safety with the Philistines, of all people, is a final proof how thoroughly he had mastered his own territory and mastered also his own problem. In the south, at least, he had at last made a *Land of Israel.*

Further, in his noble panegyric over the fallen King, David pays an unnoticed tribute to the outward prosperity that Saul brought to impoverished Israel. He calls on the women to lament the loss of the nation's noble benefactor:—

> "Daughters of Israel, wail for Saul,
> Who decked you in scarlet and jewels,
> Who adorned your robes with gold!"

That is not only the verse of a poem. It records the growing commercial prosperity that Saul's strong reign began and encouraged. The future wealth and magnificence of Israel, through trade and commerce, sprang from the economic and political gains of the first king. The stability he secured in Israel's social conditions made this early commerce possible.

His defeat at Gilboa has foolishly darkened our judgment of Saul's achievements. But his defeat, let us remember, was against the full might of Philistia, an alarmed Philistia that put every ounce into the effort. He and his men fell fighting an infinitely superior foe, who swamped them with numbers and sheer weight of armaments. There are limits to the possible.

Without any doubt, David built on the constructive work of Saul. No defeat on Mount Gilboa could destroy Saul's marvellous feat—a united people, with a new passion for freedom. This was his great legacy to his successors, and especially to David. Without the defeated Saul and his consolidating work, there would have been no conquering David.

Thus Saul's great political bequest was the advent of this new Israel, united and patriotic. He welded the jealous tribes into a people conscious of a common heritage and a future. He gave them the one thing they lacked, (the absence of which had broken his own youthful spirit), *a dream of freedom.* Whatever Saul was or was not, he was a patriot. The gifts that his patriotism bequeathed to Israel were never lost from now onwards. On these things, grimly soldered by his blood and the blood of his sons, the future empire was built. Discriminating observers cannot miss the spiritual and political gain of Saul's accomplishment. He found Israel a loose web of warring tribes, parochial in thought and outlook, a house divided against itself: but when he died on Mount Gilboa, that ancient Flodden, with the "flowers of the forest" lying strewn around him, Israel was *Israel.* Israel at last, though born in blood.

Would that all vaunted political successes were as real!

V

In a true view, then, we cannot deny Saul's genuine political success. With some understandable narrowness, people have not been able to see beyond his last disastrous rout. But it is as foolish to deny Saul's work and genius because of the catastrophe on Mount Gilboa as it would be to deny Napoleon's greatness because of Waterloo.

The more serious charge of failure against Saul has to do with his character. It may be, however, that a dispassionate consideration of the man as he faces his problem may "gentle" our thoughts regarding him.

At the outset, we know the kind of man he was when he first appeared on the scene. That shy, modest man, head and shoulders over his fellows, makes one of the most charming pictures in the Bible. It is quite plain that he took up the onerous and thankless task of kingship from no foolish self-confidence, and certainly from no vaulting ambition. He distrusted himself and his own qualifications more than great men usually do. When the people set out to find him after his selection as King, they found him hiding among the stuff! There is no doubt whatever that he assumed his difficult task in a sincere trust in God, and at the call of a genuine patriotism. He knew how difficult the task was, and was conscious of his own limitations. But he expected, and had a right to expect, certain things that were denied him.

He expected, in the first place, the support of the people who had chosen him, and especially of his fellow-chiefs who had forced Samuel's hand to give them a king. Most fairly, the records show that from the outset many people either despised him and his office, or were jealous of his choice. Many of the other nobles, who had perhaps hoped for election, laughed and sneered at the young King. *"How shall this man save us? And they despised him."* There was evidently no loyalty or support to be obtained from these malcontents. That he belonged to the small and unimportant tribe of Benjamin only added to his difficulties.

Further, and most of all, he expected the invaluable support of Samuel and his influential party. But Samuel seemed to want to keep him a King in leading-strings. How often has ecclesiastical pretension set itself up against state policy! We know how Samuel broke with Saul, and as we have already seen, it is hard to understand on what righteous grounds, other than Saul's assertion of the authority of his own office, the breach took place. The main point is, that it *did* take place, and Saul suffered grievously thereby. The apparent enmity of the religious party, who had been deprived of many ancient privileges, had more to do with Saul's "failure" than we commonly allow.

Now, fairness demands that we ask ourselves *how all these capricious or unmerited oppositions would react on an exceedingly sensitive and shy nature, highly strung and passionately patriotic?* We have seen that Saul's position as King was not of his own seeking. He had assumed it reluctantly and only in a sincere love for his native land and because Samuel assured him of the favour of Jehovah. But with a dreadfully apathetic people, with the contempt of the nobles for any national discipline that infringed their own tribal power, with not only the loss of Samuel's favour, but also the transference of his favour to another, with the religious party's opposition and their open preaching of his "rejection," and finally, with the continued strain of the hopeless guerrilla warfare against the might of Philistia, is it any wonder that Saul's spirit broke in dark moments and he fell into deep moods of depression?

This depression and moody melancholy are simply the reflex of his abnormally modest and sensitive soul. Fine people suffer finely; and patriots are hurt more by contempt for their dreams than by contempt for themselves.

After years of gruelling experience, with so little backing, (one little verse throws a strong light on Saul's experience: *"There was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul"*), the King's depression and disappointment developed into a real malady. We are apt to forget that at times (to use an American phrase) Saul was a "sick man!" Modern medical opinion is very gentle with him. In the end, he became what we should call a "nervous case," whose nerve storms produced temporary paroxysmal mania. We know, for instance, how in his better moments he loved both David and Jonathan deeply. Yet such was the temporary disease of his mind, that, as is usual in these cases, it was his loved ones he attacked most. In our modern medical knowledge, we must regard him as a "diseased" man, whose terrible burdens had affected his sensitive mind: and we must treat him and judge him as we should treat a hospital case! It may be a charge against him that he allowed his depression, in earlier days, to have its way with him until he became as moody as King Lear or as tortured as Timon of Athens. But anyone who can picture his situation of hopeless difficulties, from friend and foe alike, will be more sympathetic than judging. The continual buffets which Saul received, especially from his own people and from the religious party on which he had originally depended, must have been like wounds to a man so abnormally shy, whose patriotism alone had thrust him into this undesired prominence.

The picture of his notorious jealousy of David must be regarded in this same sympathetic light. Let us remember that we only know this story from the chronicler of David. What ground there was for his suspicion of the young man is uncertain. So fair a critic in Dr A. C. Welch comes to this non-committal finding: "To the darkened mind of the King it seemed by no means impossible that ambition might prove too strong for gratitude and kinship. . . . How far this quarrel was the result of baseless suspicion in the diseased mind of the King, and how far it may have been justified by facts, must always remain uncertain. . . . It is not an impossibility that the active patriotic mind of the young soldier may have seen the need, if the country were to be delivered, of some stronger hand upon the reins of government at that period. It is also possible that he may have been betrayed into words or acts which wrought with extra power on the morbid mind of Saul." But whether Saul had any ground for his charge of conspiracy against David, or was only obsessed with his popularity, his own broken state of nervous health must be remembered in our judgment. Nowadays, we do not hold a man responsible if he is not responsible! A first-class alienist has assured me that under modern regime, Saul at his worst moments was "certifiable." The long strain had broken his spirit and preyed on his mind.

There is no doubt that the sensitive, trustful, and happy man of the early days was changed into the disappointed and morbidly fitful soul of later times by the oppression and hopelessness of his task, the indifference of the people, and the unexpected hostility of Samuel's party. The last of these must have seemed the worst, like the knife-thrust of a friend.

Yet even after his nervous depression fell on him like a cloud, he appeared at all normal times as a noble and resolute King. Some of the incidents told of him have all the marks of the native dignity of a big man. One incident especially impresses me, though it is often used against Saul by undiscerning people. When Samuel announced his rejection, and asserted that the kingdom would pass from him, Saul, who had manfully expressed his repentance, turned and asked the prophet to "honour me now before the elders of my people and before Israel." That is one of the noblest requests a man could make. He knew that he himself could now receive no personal honour from Samuel, but he asked *honour for his office,* lest people should despise the kingship itself! And there is a certain dignity in the quiet manner in which he thus announces to the prophet that he is still his King, and expects the outward observance of respect and honour. No wonder David afterwards found a wholesome reverence for the office of King after the strong dignity of this man, who is wonderful even in his rejection.

There are two things in his life that must be pressed very lightly indeed. On the one hand, his wild slaughter of the priests who sheltered David is, unfortunately, not out of focus with the amazing cruelty that was typical of his age. There was vindictive passion in his act, but it was an age of vindictive passion. And on the other hand, the consultation of the Witch at Endor cannot be pressed too much. In one way, the record gives him credit for a religious enlightenment altogether beyond his age. Believing that witchcraft and its allied arts were essentially *irreligious*—indeed, the negation of true faith in Jehovah—he cleared the land of all their debasing enchantments. This is a greater testimony to Saul's intellectual and spiritual outlook than any other fact we know of him, and it argues an enlightenment quite unexpected in his own age. If at the end he had that secret lapse to the practice he himself despised, we must remember his tortured soul and the physical depression that can so easily colour any man's faith. Moreover, his recourse to the "black arts" is due, as the narrative admits, to the opposition of the religious party who at this time in their deepening rejection shut the door of their office in his face. He "inquired of the Lord" again and again through the prophets, but they refused to give him guidance and counsel. To put it in our modern phrase, they had practically "excommunicated" him from the service of their office. We do not know why Saul incurred such persistent opposition from the religious leaders, for we must admit that the two variant reasons given for his "rejection" are the outcome of later priestly reflection and are no true indication of the religious ideas of his day. One might well hazard that the prophets, only too human, then as now, were alarmed at Saul's growing temporal power, (a proof by the way of his consolidation of the kingdom), and were jealous of this new kingship that had been forced upon them by popular demand, to the loss of their ancient prestige.

VI

Thus the rod of Saul's power was broken on the anvil of his own friends. He is one of the great tragic figures of history who fought against immeasurable difficulties, within and without, and struggled against the decrees of fate. His real success is dimmed by the bias of his own age, which could not understand the gloom of that battle where he and his sons were slain, and where he was apparently "forgotten of God." He has suffered too in comparison with the successful, romantic, and "pious" David. All through his reign, David received the blessing of the Church which had been denied to Saul. By David's time, moreover, the idea of kingship in Israel was no longer questioned, but accepted as normal, and indeed as best. Thus David had a task infinitely less overwhelming than his predecessor. Most of all, David built on the great foundations of a tested and united people, born in a new patriotism, which was alone the creation of Saul's notable reign.

A fair study of the records will show us that Saul was one of the heroic figures of Old Testament history. Patriotism, a strange quality in those days, and faith in God's choice alone thrust him into the arduous life which of himself he would never have chosen. He is one of the few great men of great days who came to power without any selfish dream of personal ambition. Every quality of his modest character, except patriotism and faith, would have kept him quietly on his father's farm. But with the dream in his heart, (among people, alas, who had no dream), he stepped into the breach as the deliverer of Israel. There is only one verdict. *He did deliver Israel,* if not from the Philistines at least from itself! That, perhaps, was the greatest deliverance that Israel could have. It was the only step, moreover, towards any fuller freedom. We may truly say of its first King that he made Israel a kingdom, and gave it a soul. Mount Gilboa, with its outward temporary disaster, has blinded our eyes to his magnificent achievements.

In general character, Saul was a lovable man. His modesty at the beginning of his reign is a delight to simple hearts. His heroism before constant danger is a glory. His personal courage in tackling his great task is an inspiration to every one who has had to face fearful odds. His fidelity to duty and his patience in consolidating Israel is a lesson to every patriot. No doubt his people desired something dramatic and spectacular, with a Samsonesque touch, and were unready for the long, slow upbuilding which the situation demanded: but Saul's work was the salvation of Israel. God makes no mistakes, and in spite of Samuel's rejection, Saul was, and remains, God's choice for Israel.

He showed traits of nobility and gentleness that were rare in his own darkened age. When the chiefs sneered at him after his election, he said never a word: and later, when the victorious people wished to punish his deriders, he was generous enough to seek no personal revenge, though it might have paid him to be rid thus early of his detractors. His demand from Samuel that the people should respect his office as King is the more notable in the light of this unusual leniency. It proves that while he was big enough to overlook what was merely a *personal* affront, he could stand, if need be, on a just dignity for the sake of his holy calling! I am glad that he was quietly strong enough to compel Samuel to respect the office he himself had created. It argued a big nature to be able to overlook his own rejection without whining, and yet insist on the essentials of his kingly position.

It is by his heroism that Saul will always be remembered. He stands among the great patriots—the Bruces, the William Tells, the Garibaldis—who fanned a nation's soul into life and freedom. But none of the great patriots that I can recall had ever such a heartless and thankless task as he had, amid apathy and opposition, within and without. If in the long bitter fight his big heart broke, and he fell into despondency and broken health, he deserves our sympathy more than our judgment. His work remains as his imperishable monument.

Amid the perplexities of his unhappy life, when free from his disabling malady, he was a man of honour and chivalry, noble in nature, brave in action, generous in conduct. I love to remember the gallantry of the man as he "carried on" with the onerous duties of his great task, though knowing that he and his line were finally rejected by the prophets of God. Never once did he whine or complain at his fate. He treated Samuel at the moment of his rejection with the dignity of a gentleman. The reason, I think, lies in this, that before everything he was a great soldier; and through all the vicissitudes of his tragic life, he showed a soldier's best virtues—gallantry, courage, faithfulness, and uncomplaining fidelity.

The real *fineness* of Saul's nature—fine like silk thread among rough wool—is nowhere more beautifully shown than in his times of repentance and honest apology. How graciously and humbly, with such unreserved contrition, he could repent of his follies and stoop down to apologise! I should not say "stoop down" but "rise up"; for it is only a manly soul that can stand the acid test of apology and penitence. There is one verse, one among many, that makes me admire this kingly man for the quality of his soul. "Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." It is a spiritual joy to see this generous man on his knees.

His worst enemy never accused him of a single immorality—or of anything shady or mean. The Bible itself never reproaches him, except to say that God took the kingdom from him. Dr A. B. Davidson speaks of his "almost immaculate life, so singular in an Oriental ruler, and in such contrast with the life even of his successor." The same writer, in a very beautiful sentence, gives the finest *apologia* for his dramatic end. "His last act of self-destruction was done at the bidding of a fastidious honour, lest the unclean hands of the uncircumcised Philistines should abuse him."

But Dr Davidson fails, I think, in his main criticism of Saul, and fails, most unexpectedly, on a question of interpretation. He alleges that Saul was not "religious." Then he adds the following corroboration of his belief: "Even the common people remarked it. It was to them, with their often keen insight into character, very observable. Hence they thought it even amusing when Saul was seen in the company of the prophets; and it gave rise to a popular proverb at his expense, *Is Saul also among the prophets?* It was quite incongruous to them, this consorting with men of profound religious convictions and experiences on the part of one who hitherto had not only shown no liking for such company, but who, anyone could see, had no capacity for such a life and such duties as the prophets undertook."

But Dr Davidson has fallen into a grave mistake, from which his own notable book on *Old Testament Prophecy* should have saved him. That the people made comment on Saul's presence among the prophets was *pained surprise,* not pleasure or even amusement! With the exception of a few notable men like Samuel, the roving bands of prophets in those days were little more than "dancing dervishes," who fell into fierce and uncontrolled excitement and wild frenzy. That lurid verse, 1 Samuel xix. 24, shows us some of the fierce delirium of these people: *"And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?"* These "wandering seers" walked along the country roads in gangs, accompanied by music to excite their emotions and visions (1 Samuel x. 5), and fell into fierce excesses of declamatory frenzy. There are hints, and more than hints, in the Old Testament narratives that the common people looked at the bands of prophets askance. There was something in Israel's reasoned sanity that always disapproved of mere emotionalism. Jehovah was a God of the ordinary life, not of moments of frenzy. Thus, when they saw the quiet, respectable Saul among this "intoxicated" company, they were gravely surprised that one who was generally so dependable, so sensible, and so reasonable should be among such uncontrolled people. Saul was the son of a Chief of position and power, and to see him among these spiritual ragamuffins caused them disbelieving surprise. Their question, therefore, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" does not mean, as Dr Davidson suggests, *"Has this irreligious man at last become religious?"* but *"Has this quiet and reasonable Hebrew become hectic and frenzied and unbalanced?"* Thus the sentence makes no possible reflection on Saul's religious qualities—none whatever! It suggests only the first alarming note of that excitable strain in his nature, meanwhile subdued and undeveloped, which later broke out and ruined his life. It may even be a fact that his frequent association in later days with the prophetic orgies was one of the causes of his mental breakdown! An excitable or sensitive nature cannot play with these emotional excesses without grave hurt. In any case, to speak of these roving people, compared with Saul, as "men of profound religious convictions and experiences" is only amusing.

If a man is not truly "religious" who alters his whole life and undertakes undesired duties and dangers at what he believes to be the call of God, then I shiver to think what religion really is. There can be no reasonable doubt that Saul undertook his life-work, and carried it on through thankless years, only from two dominating motives—patriotism for the Israel of God, and faith in the God of Israel. It is foolish to stress, as Dr Davidson does, Saul's expression in speaking to Samuel, "The Lord thy God," as if he were unable to say, "The Lord my God." This phrase means that with his meticulous honour he was granting to Samuel what he claimed for himself—respect for his special office as priest, and admission of the prophet's right to give direct messages from Jehovah. This, again, is pre-eminently "the soldier's virtue" in every age—to devolve functions to special men and to respect each man in his own department. The great point to remember about Saul is that his patriotism was founded on one fact, *that Israel was God's possession.* It was his faith that drew him into the enterprise, and his faith that kept him there.

Two of the most gracious characters in all literature are David and Jonathan. The man who could earn, on the one hand, the unfailing loyalty, respect, and love of a son like Jonathan, and on the other hand, the deathless praise of a former friend like David, whom he had persecuted, must have been worthy even of these things! That poignant lament by David—as much a tribute to his own worth as to Saul's—is the final proof of the King's noble character, the wonderful attraction he exercised, and the respect he earned in spite of his moments of mental fury. No "failure" has ever been wailed like this:—

> "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
> And in their death they were not divided:
> They were swifter than eagles,
> They were stronger than lions.
> How are the mighty fallen,
> And the weapons of war perished!"

In character, apart from the dark moments of his malady, Saul was always the same brave, lovable, modest, honest, and honourable patriot who gave up everything for his dreams. The name "Israel" was written on his heart.

In losing his own life, he gave life to his people.

A STATEMENT FOR JEZEBEL

THE world's judgment of Jezebel may be seen best in its literature. In every language of Christendom, when the last defiling adjective is needed for some scheming or flaring woman, the speaker seems to touch his climax when he points the finger and says: "Thou Jezebel!" When that has been said, all has been said. It is the final insult, which comment only weakens.

Has the world been right in its judgment of this woman? Or have the generations sinned against her memory by some trick of historical bias?

History, as a balanced and impartial summary of facts, (all the facts, and not merely a selection to dress an argument), is a modern creation, much more modern, indeed, than many of us suppose. We have learned also, as our fathers never did, to sift evidence and judge its quality. In older days, many a chronicler picked his facts to suit his thesis, and sometimes was not above giving them a judicious twist. It would almost seem as if his aim had been to prove some favoured character a hero, or some rival a desperate villain. As we put it, he had a case to argue! Perhaps this explains why so many of the characters of early history seem either saints or devils! The historian—if such we may call him—was proving a thesis instead of searching for truth.

This kind of history, written at an angle or tinged with prejudice, has been desperately hard on many people. Should some unlucky person, for instance, have been identified with a hated cause, there would seem to be no end to the obloquy that was peppered on his memory. The historian, like a pugilist, delivered his smashing blows and left his helpless enemy sprawling on the ground: and every generation wiped its muddy feet on his body. After this scurvy treatment, it is scarcely possible for an honest critic to place the man on his legs again. Even should he succeed in this task of Hercules, there is that terrible quality about mud—that it sticks and soils!

I

To my thinking, Jezebel has been one of these misjudged people who have suffered from an historical twist. In the first place, she has suffered the hard fate of being known only through the criticism of her enemies, whose disapproval of her acts was expressed in the harsh and unbalanced language of ancient moral condemnation. None of us would ever like to be seen only through the eyes of our foes. Further, she has been hated and abhorred, not mainly because she herself was particularly abhorrent, (that is, more than others of her own caste and generation), but because as a worshipper of Baal she focused in herself a cause that all later Jews learned to fear and detest as their national danger. In their hatred of the cause she represented, they heaped the greater odium on her head. One petty way to hurt a cause is to slander the people who support it!

We can understand this from our own experience. There are people who detest some prominent politician, not because he himself is insufferable or outrageous, but because the opinions and the party he represents are their pet aversion. In a past generation, many people abhorred Disraeli: others thought Gladstone a wicked man who aimed at constitutional ruin. Both men, as we know from their biographies, were everything that was good and honourable: but *for the causes they represented,* thousands of people either feared or slandered them. Their colour, black or white, came from the prejudice that judged them.

This, I think, is particularly true of Jezebel. No one who has read her record would claim that she was a good or gracious or even reputable woman. Her character, while strong and reliant, had no winsome quality that could command either reverence or affection. Her conduct, private and public, was often both cruel and pitiless. Few men or women have lived in this world with less conscience and fewer scruples. Yet, in spite of all that may be justly charged against her, I am convinced that her popular reputation is not wholly deserved. The common picture of her, that picture that has made her name a byword for cruelty and looseness, is either faulty or untrue. In any case, the colours are too lurid. If I may use a common proverb on her behalf, the devil is not as black as she is painted!

I can never help being amused, and a little wistful, that so much of the popular prejudice against Jezebel is the outcome of a foolish error. She has been libelled by mistake. Most of the derision and contempt that has gathered round her name has sprung from a pathetic, I had almost said a comical, blunder.

The scene that has brought particular odium upon her reputation and given literature a new phrase is that last act of her life, so dramatically pictured in the Bible, where she dressed herself in her queenly robes, tired her hair, painted her eyelids and eyebrows, and sat waiting to meet her death, dressed in state as a grand lady to the last finicking detail. From that scene have come most of the fierce adjectives applied to her name. We speak to-day of a woman being "painted like Jezebel," or "as brazen as Jezebel." Because of this apparent masquerade, her name has been borrowed as an epithet of scorn, as we use Judas to father a traitor or Demas a renegade. But it is all a ludicrous mistake, as I hope to show you later, a mistake in interpretation and a mistake in psychology, a foolish misreading of a very wonderful incident. I question, indeed, if this last scene of her life, which has roused the world's scorn, is not the noblest and most admirable act in the woman's stormy drama. To my mind, it is the one moment in her reign when she was really a great queen and a great woman.

II

In the meantime, let us ask what is known of this tempestuous person, and from these facts form some measured estimate of her.

She was the daughter of one of the famous Kings of Tyre, the great business city and kingdom of the north that played such a controlling part in the ancient world and was the pioneer of modern commercial seafaring. In time, she married Ahab, King of Israel. There is no question that both Ahab and Israel considered this union a great match, for it assured their little land the enormous prestige and backing of the Tyrian kingdom against their enemies.

During her reign in Israel, the outstanding quality we find in Jezebel is her passionate and unfaltering adherence to her own national religion. She had been brought up to worship Baal, and she stood by her faith with amazing passion till the day of her death. In itself, such a quality of staunchness is no light recommendation. If we sweep prejudice out of our hearts, we shall admit, even though her Baal worship was a blot in Israel, that it is refreshing to see someone who really believes her beliefs! Jezebel was as true to her religion and her own lights as any Israelite was to his own faith.

If we take issue with her that she did not change her religion for the worship of Jehovah, I ask you to remember certain things that should be noted in historical fairness.

In the first place, it should be remembered that the worship of Jehovah in that day was by no means the pure and austere thing it became in later ages. Indeed, the popular worship was often a strange amalgam of the purer rites of Israel with the debasing ideas of old Canaanitish paganism, where local "Baals" fought for precedence with Jehovah. Sometimes, indeed, it must have seemed to Jezebel as if there were no moral difference between Israel's religion and her own. Except for the words of the prophets, (which were honoured more in the breach than the observance), the faith of the people was debased, crude, and sometimes as ignorant and cruel as the worship of Baal! Even in a much later age, Amos establishes this charge beyond question.

Further, if we may judge by the people Jezebel met in the court life of Israel, we may say confidently that the popular religion of her adopted land produced no better fruit of life or character than the religion of Baal. We have only to recall the type of person around her—Ahab himself, Omri his father, or Jehu who waded through blood to a throne—to see what Jezebel must have seen. If she judged a faith by its fruit, her own religion seemed as good as Israel's!

Still further, we must remember one of the common religious ideas of the day. The God of Tyre was the God of Tyre, and the God of Israel was the God of Israel! By that we mean that the sphere of each deity was strictly limited in popular thought to its own land and its own people, an idea that was popularly accepted by the Israelites of Jezebel's day. When Naaman, for instance, asked for a load of soil to take with him to Damascus, he did so with the idea that he could only fittingly worship Israel's God on Israel's soil. Late too, when Jonah refused to go to Nineveh to preach Jehovah's message of repentance, he shirked the mission because he believed that Jehovah was only Israel's God and had no real interest in foreigners. Jonah himself, if you remember, took a ship to flee to Tarshish in the vain idea that he might thus escape the territorial sway of Israel's God. Thus to Jezebel, the choice between Jehovah and Baal was not a choice between the one true God (whom the later Jews knew and we know) and a false God, but between the God of her own people and the God of the Israelites. Hence, we may easily understand her loyalty to Baal, the God of her own land, especially if she saw, as she did see, that the popular religion of Jehovah made no apparent difference in a man's integrity or goodness.

Once more, it should also be noted that the splendid ritual of Baal was certain to appeal more deeply to the æsthetic mind of the Phœnician Queen than the simpler religion of Israel. Ideally, though not actually, in her day the worship of Jehovah was simple and austere, without images and impressive rituals. It is only fair to admit that many people, like Jezebel, prefer, and perhaps need, a more *visible* religion than Jehovah's worship was in ideal and practice. In her own Baal worship she would find the sensuous impressive pomp that would suit her Phœnician mind.

III

One very important admission should be made in regard to Jezebel. There can be little doubt that she did not actually *begin* that bitter religious persecution which broke out like a plague in her later days. Indeed, her early policy was not persecution but toleration—what some thought shameful toleration, but still toleration. As a matter of fact, it was her toleration of all kinds of gods and all kinds of worship that first annoyed the single-minded Elijah and stirred the original trouble. When she came as Queen to Israel, she brought her Phœnician habit of mind, and asked that her worship of Baal be allowed to proceed side by side with the worship of Jehovah.

Indeed, it is almost inconceivable to imagine Jezebel as *originating* a persecution of Jehovah or any other God. With her religious temper and training, she would gladly have added Jehovah to her tribe of gods! *The Encyclopœdia of Religion and Ethics* gives a list of eighty-three deities worshipped and tolerated in the pantheon of the Phœnicians. If the

Phœnicians met a new god, they simply added him to the bunch! Now, this was Jezebel's inheritance and training. To her, all religions were equally good, and one's allegiance was a matter of preference. This, no doubt, seemed a shameful toleration to Elijah, who believed that Jehovah was the one true God, and whose religious crusade was a noble attempt to restore the early simplicity of the desert-worship of Israel. But there can be no question that Jezebel was only asking for herself the spacious latitude of Tyrian toleration.

No doubt, for the future well-being of Israel, Elijah and his fellow-prophets were wise in resisting this claim with all their passion. They could not possibly admit the right of Baal to be worshipped equally with Jehovah. Nonetheless, it is only historically fair to notice that at the beginning what Jezebel claimed was merely liberty to worship as her fathers worshipped and as her conscience demanded. We moderns, with our rights and liberties, would never contest such a reasonable claim or think it impossible. Moreover, the new queen was only asking the latitude that had been previously allowed and practised in the days of the great Solomon, when it had been possible in Jerusalem to worship as one wished. But Elijah had not lived in Solomon's easy days, Elijah with the single mind and the passionate regard for the one true God of Israel! Let us remember, however, that the clash of religious passion was begun not by Jezebel the foreign queen, but by Elijah the native prophet. Of course, once the persecution had been started, she could easily outdo Elijah in fierceness, for not only did she have a similar passion, but she had power and troops at her back to do her will. Even if she did begin the brutal "killing time," as no doubt she did, that was her insolent imperious reply to the prophets who preached a crusade against her religion.

IV

With this said (and it is only said in modern fairness, not as a criticism of Elijah's great policy of a pure Israel), let us ask what we know of the woman's character.

From her story in the Bible, most of us picture her as a garish, scheming and crafty woman, to whom both guile and greed were second nature. I notice in the dictionary that the word "Jezebel," as used in common speech, is defined *virago,* or a *loud, vulgar woman, crafty and cruel.*

Is this picture trustworthy? Three adjectives are used in this definition—vulgar, cruel, and crafty. In the first place, was she vulgar? That idea has come from the last scene of her life. I need not answer the charge here, but I refer my reader to my exposition of that scene at the close of this essay. If from that scene he still thinks her vulgar, I shall grant him his whole case.

In the second place, was she cruel? That is not the real question. The real question is this—was she any more cruel than the people of her own day or of her own court? It is unfair to judge a person like Jezebel by our modern standards of Christian mercy and tenderness. She ought to be judged, not by our light, but by the light of her age and customs. If we do that, we shall not lightly mark her down as an "unexampled monster of cruelty." Compare her for a moment, say, with *Jehu* who murdered her, Jehu the Israelite, not only a worshipper of Jehovah, but one who professed to do his cruelties in Jehovah's name. Why! Jehu shed so much blood that if we had been walking along the quiet roads of Israel, some of it would have spattered in our faces!

In the third place, was she crafty? Was she more crafty, say, than the average Israelite who admired guile as one of the business virtues, and whose Eastern humour often consisted in laughing at an opponent who had been tricked? Remember how the Jews admired Jacob as the father of all craft and trickery. They gloried in him as their clever ancestor, even in his unregenerate days, and they applauded him for the smart deceit by which he filched the birthright from his brother and tricked his blind father. If Jezebel showed cruel guile in snatching Naboth's vineyard for her husband, was her craft as an act any different in kind or any worse in degree than the vicious expedient by which David stole another man's wife? David repented of his sin, we know, in bitter tears, and paid for his deed in blood and sorrow. But that is not the point—the original craft was there, in his case as much as in Jezebel's, and what is more, he carried his deed through against a greater light and privilege. We need balance and perspective in our judgments.

The truth is, Jezebel, this imperious pagan, was the natural product of her own day, only with more power and will than most to gain her ends. The records of her time make grim reading. No one seems better than another. Power and privilege were gravely misused, and life was cheap. Men of violence, true to their name, lived by violence, and men of blood by blood. As we read the all too candid records of the day, we are forced, I think, to two general conclusions. First, Jezebel, called a monster of cruelty, was at least no worse than the people of her own day. Second, we should go down on our knees and praise Almighty God that Jesus Christ has come and cleansed this wicked world! Incidentally also, we should never speak, even by way of sentiment, of the good old days!

V

From the story of her stormy life, we picture Jezebel, in our modern phrase, as a "strong-minded woman," able, daring, resolute, and clever. There is more than a suspicion that Ahab, her husband, was as "pliant clay" in her dominant hands. She was undoubtedly the power behind the throne, and was one of that select group of audacious, "high-headed" women whose personal destinies have done much to shape the history of their own day.

If we make due allowance for the natural disparity of their day and civilisation, an interesting parallel may be drawn between Jezebel of Tyre and that sister queen who has been a twin enigma to historians, Mary, Queen of Scots. Both brought with them an alien outlook and culture that had no contact with the people they had to rule; and both were thrust into a somewhat passionate religious community, where "puritan" and theological interests with which they had no sympathy were foremost. Both queens were "suspect" from their earliest days, and received no real acceptance, and certainly no real trust, from their people. Both were women of unbending personal will and disturbing passion, tumultuous souls, who either commanded blind adoration like Ahab's, or unsleeping distrust like Knox's. They were amazingly determined in their hearts, and as audacious and high-handed in their methods. Neither of them had any gift to understand an opponent's point of view, and they had no tact or grace in expressing their own. What they wanted, they must have without question, as by divine right. They lacked the wit or the diplomacy to "stoop to conquer!" Though neither could brook opposition, it was their fate to be "dared" and frustrated by a flaming prophet. Men were in their hands like tools, and yet men broke them. Both had a certain non-moral element in them that shocks us, and yet both were defeated, not so much by the religion they so openly opposed, as by *moral indignation* at their sins. They each antagonised the worthiest people of their day, and yet had the most passionate allegiance. Both paid for their faults of insolence, if not for their crimes, by a death of ignominy; and yet both of them, by the vivid colour and tone of their personality, are as much alive to-day, and as much an intriguing puzzle to-day, as ever they were. In fine, they were both women of amazing character and dominant will, whose personal destinies shaped the course of their generation, for weal or woe.

Jezebel makes a patch of vivid colour in Israel's drab life, like the "Tyrian purple" of her own land. We can picture her oval Phœnician face, with the fine nose, moulded chin, full-lipped mouth, and clear, haughty eyes of her people. She loved colour and tone, as all Phœnicians did, this people who invented most of the gorgeous dyes of the ancient world. We know the spectacular life amid which she was reared, in a city whose wealth was a byword and whose mariners roamed the northern seas to snatch treasure even from the mines of savage Cornwall.

She was indeed the natural offspring of this dominant race, from whom even the Greeks learned their early culture, and who were the first sea-faring colonists of the world, the people who gave civilisation to the Ægean Isles and founded Carthage when Rome was a village. It was to this people that the glorious Solomon appealed for the art and craftsmanship of the first Temple. It is interesting also to think of Jezebel as the great-aunt of the famous Queen Dido, who founded Carthage, and from whom came the world's greatest military genius, the incomparable Hannibal.

As a daughter of a lordly people, she had been taught to regard life with cultured insolence: and in many ways, she must have shivered at the crudities and provincialisms of rural Israel. Narrowness, especially religious narrowness, she had never known, for all cults had found a habitat and a toleration in ancient Tyre. By nature and training, she had no bigotry, and of herself would never have begun religious persecution. But by the passion and arrogance of her race, when roused, she was a woman of fire and lava. Knowing her own hot desires, she made headlong for them as by right. Long before any "doctrine of divine right" was preached, she *lived* it! Prideful, haughty, insolent, if you will: but her faults were in her blood, the insolence of race and the insolence of rule.

She wanted Naboth's vineyard, for instance. Rather, (again let us be fair), it was not so much that *she* wanted the vineyard, as that she wanted it for her petulant and whining husband! Ahab was that kind of creature who wills the evil thing, but lacks the mind to plan it. Jezebel, it is true to say, did not will the vile thing of herself: but when she willed it, for herself or others, she had the directness, the flame, and the guile to compass her ends.

We recall the crafty scheme she employed to gain her purpose. It is from this judicial murder of Naboth, and from the closing garish scene of her life, that most of the odium has gathered round her name. I shall hope to show that the closing scene of her life has been foolishly misinterpreted. For this sin against Naboth, done on behalf of her contemptible husband, there is nothing but the deepest condemnation. It is one of the shadiest and most unscrupulous misuses of power in history. Yet I should like to say one thing, (not that it condones her crime), that King David, the Lord's Anointed, committed that more grievous and unpardonable sin against Uriah, to rob him of his wife, and yet we do not judge David for his craft and cruelty as we judge Jezebel. It is not enough to say that David repented, or that the Bible shows how God punished him and his children for his sin. While this alters our view of the man, it cannot alter *the quality of his act.* That act, both in execution and in personal motive, was even more abominable than Jezebel's, and was planned and carried through in spite of greater light and privilege. Yet it is only on Jezebel's act that the world has heaped its undying scorn. But then, Jezebel was a pagan, and in the minds of later Jews was identified with the abomination of national idolatry!

It is a curious nemesis on Ahab and Jezebel that it was the popular shock and rebound against this piece of greed and cruelty, rather than any general objection to her paganism, that led in the end to the undoing of Ahab and herself. People who may not be moved by a question of faith are often moved by a question of justice.

The Bible has been fairer than later history to Jezebel and her memory. That later history in its prejudice has said some scandalous things concerning her, which have no place in the historical records. She has been accused of all types of moral looseness, so that her name has become a byword for a "woman of the streets." Even the author of Revelation, following the later bias, used her name as an epitome of carnal sin. Needless to say, there is no ground for this slander in the historical records. Its only suggestion lies in the quoted words of that man of blood, Jehu. And I should never believe what a foul-mouthed fellow like Jehu would say! He is the kind of viper that spits venom. His own mother would never be safe from the unclean mind of a man like that.

VI

We come now to the drop of the curtain, that last wild scene at the upstairs window, when Jehu came driving furiously to end her life. She is now an old woman. She has outlived Ahab by ten years, and has seen her two sons on the throne. But Jehu the bloodhound is hot on her trail and the trail of her children.

She has heard that the day has gone with Jehu, who is now on his way, with his sword dripping red, to end the business. It is from this scene, and from what she then did, that she has been so miserably miscalled. From this last masquerade of hers we have coined the words that are now a phrase of our literature, "a painted Jezebel." Let us look at this scene of a woman's drama for a moment, that we may see into its heart and hers.

There she is, in the upper room, with the women and eunuchs of her court around her. Bad news flies fast, and the message of Jehu's victory and Jehu's coming has flown in at the window. What will she do? She knows there is little mercy to be expected at those red hands. She might fly, as many another brave woman has done. She might wait and go on her knees and implore mercy from Jehu, knowing that this type of man is often flattered by a sense of power and by the feeling that great people grovel at his feet. But Jezebel is good steel to the end, and a king's daughter to the end. It is not her quality either to fly or whine. If she has lived gallantly, she will die gallantly. "But your majesty," cry her fluttered women, "there is still time to flee, and there are saddled horses at the gate." Then Jezebel, always grand even in her sin and passion, does her last grand thing. "Bring my robes," she says, "my royal garments and my crown. Be quick, woman! Fetch that eye ointment and my toilet service. This is the day when I must be Queen. I am a king's daughter and a king's widow and the mother of kings. And as such I will die."

So, with the nearing beat of Jehu's horses drumming in her ears, she arrays herself in her royal splendour. She tires her hair. She stencils her eyebrows with the fashionable paint of the day, as all great ladies did for royal occasions. She adorns herself with her earrings and her rings. She gallantly prepares herself for a grand exit. Then with a dignity, a fortitude, and a composure in her act that should have touched the world's admiration instead of earning its scorn, she walks quietly to the verandah of the open window, as Jehu clatters into the courtyard.

And from the verandah, looking down on that red-handed murderer with the disdain of kings in her blood, she . . . begs? . . . No! She *mocks!* She calls him the murderer he is, and laughs at his bloated triumph. So, dressed like a queen, once a queen and always a queen, she dies like the daughter of the King of Tyre!

It is in this great scene of a woman's matchless scorn that the world has only seen *her painted face!* It has seen the paint and missed the grandeur.

We speak to-day, with appraising wonder, of the jaunty courage of the aristocrats who went with a smile to their death in the tumbrils at the French Revolution. We remember with a glow how they took snuff as they passed through the streets, dressed in their silks and ruffles, and played the great game of a noble unconcern to the end. We speak of how King Charles walked in solemn dignity and majesty to the block in London. But the French aristocrats and our own King Charles learnt anything they knew of fortitude in facing death from Jezebel, the woman of Tyre. For she went out to meet her fate in her regal robes, her dangling earrings, her dressed hair, and her painted eyebrows. And she leaned from the window and mocked her murderer.

It is one of the great scenes of human courage in literature.

VII

She was not a good woman. I do not say it. There was little in her domineering character either to love or reverence. I am not justifying her in any single act of her fierce, headstrong and gaudy life. I daresay that every moral that has been drawn from her memory has been rightly a lesson of warning. But nonetheless, she was as sincere in her own dim lights as any of those who crossed her path. Was she worse, more vicious, or more cruel, than her own cruel companions? She was better even than some of the kings who worshipped Jehovah. Most of all, I think she has been one of the most travestied characters in literature. It has been an historic irony that her queenly name is now a ribald byword—a grave injustice that is the outcome of a stupid blunder not only in interpretation, but in psychology. "Thou painted Jezebel!" Is it not a pity that the sneer in that phrase should have come from the one scene in her chequered life where she was undeniably great?

At least she died like the daughter of the King of Tyre!

A PLEA FOR GEHAZI

This is a tale of three leprosies, related to each other like the parts of a telescope. Each successive disease is drawn out from the other as a kind of consequence of the other.

The story has its natural beginning in the leprosy of Naaman, which is physical and obvious. From this there emerges a worse type of scourge, the leprosy of Elisha, which is subtle, hidden, and spiritual. These two combine, one on the spiritual side and one on the physical, to produce the leprosy of Gehazi. It is my claim that this third leprosy is the outcome of the other two, and as such it should be judged.

Gehazi has been regarded by general opinion as one of the mean and contemptible characters of the Bible. Some sins seem to have a redeeming splash of splendour in them, for they are apparently committed for big ends, and have a touch of daring and grandeur in their design and execution. But Gehazi's act appears so mean and paltry that few people have even a stray glance of pity to cast on him, far less a word of understanding. They call him a sneak-thief, and describe his act as one of the "mean sins" of human nature—greed, trickery, deceit, and lying. They may find something to admire in a Nero, a Machiavelli, or even a Judas: but for the petty sin of Gehazi they have only a curling lip.

I admit, as fully as any, his act of deceit, his greed, and his lying, though I do not put the same interpretation on his acts or his motives as many do. I claim, however, that some knowledge of the facts of the situation and of history will temper our judgment and soften our view of that hapless servant. As the curtain falls on his limping figure and he himself steals out for ever into the shadows, I feel that there will be less condemnation and more pity for the sinning man.

I

The leprosy of Naaman comes first in time and place. I speak of it very briefly, and only because it is the natural introduction to the tragedy that follows.

Naaman, high in place with the King of Syria, and himself a great man and honourable, had become smitten with that curse of ancient days, physical leprosy. This disease, happily unknown to us, though once common throughout Europe, was a product of the social conditions and habits of the people, the fruit of insanitation and neglect, as is perhaps true of every human scourge. There was only one remedy known to ancient hygiene, if remedy it could be called—pitiless exile of the stricken man from his fellows and his home, and the merciful approach of death. When that blanched spot first appeared on the pink flesh, it is little wonder that many a man's heart cracked with terror. It was the signing of the death warrant.

By some unknown means, Naaman, the mighty general of Syria's armies, had acquired the disease.

This fact in itself is a passing commentary on the invasiveness of life's griefs even through the barriers of birth, rank, or seclusion. By means very beautifully narrated in the story, the affection and faith of a little Hebrew slave girl, the Syrian commander was led to journey down from Damascus to Israel to meet the prophet Elisha, and beg for Jehovah's mercy and grace. We need not discuss the incidents of that historic interview, though the story is not without its own appeal as a study of character and outlook. In the end, Elisha gave Naaman his heart's desire, and sent him home cured by the power of Jehovah and his own faith.

This is the leprosy of Naaman, something we can easily estimate and label. I come now to the second leprosy, the leprosy of Elisha.

II

This leprosy, by contrast, is hidden and subtle, spiritual rather than physical. I cannot but think that it alone produces the crash of the closing drama.

As a result of his marvellous cure, following his own faith, the Syrian lord was so impressed and convinced that he vowed a deep belief in Jehovah, Israel's God. As an outcome of this new loyalty, he asked for some of the native soil of this favoured land to carry with him to Syria, so that, though far away from the land itself, he might still worship Israel's God on Israel's soil. This request throws an interesting spotlight on the popular belief of the age that a territorial god could only be truly worshipped on his own soil; but it also shows as definitely how resolved Naaman was to remain true to

Israel's Lord. That box of soil was to be his future altar in Damascus.

It is quite evident, therefore, that he understood clearly what his new allegiance implied. He knew that Jehovah was a "jealous God," who demanded rigorous fidelity, abhorrence of all idols and false loyalties, and strict purity of worship. His own words suggest this inference unmistakably; for he straightway turned to Elisha and made a peculiar request, which reveals how clearly he understood the quality of Israel's faith.

His request, which I give in a free paraphrase, runs as follows: "Let me explain to you, Elisha, how I am placed in the Syrian court. My master is a devout worshipper of Rimmon, the national God of our people. It is my privilege and honour to accompany my King when he worships in the great Temple; for we are so dear to each other that he always leans on my arm. Will you permit me, therefore, when I do this act of loyalty and friendship, to accommodate myself to the customs of the Temple? I truly believe and worship the Lord Jehovah, by whose power alone I have now been healed; but it would be convenient, it would indeed save a hundred awkward explanations, if I were allowed, by your gracious permission, to bow when my master bows in the Temple of Rimmon. Since I truly worship Jehovah, this act of obeisance will mean nothing to me. But your permission would be extremely convenient."

The fact that the Syrian made this plea is our clearest proof that he knew the quality of Israel's faith, and its demands on its worshippers. In Elijah's famous phrase, he knew that Jehovah was a "jealous God," who demanded all or nothing.

III

It is at this moment that tragedy begins to creep into the story. The prophet's reply to Naaman's petition ushers it in. He answered: "Go in peace, Farewell"—as much as to say, "Your plea is granted."

This is the leprosy of Elisha, the disease of an easy compromise, which in the end brings this drama to its disastrous climax. It is my claim that Elisha's vacillation and weakness made the doom of Gehazi possible. It corrupted his heart, and led him into his own folly.

I have no desire to judge Elisha harshly, though I admit that he seems to me to be one of the least of the prophets, a mimic and a shadow of a greater master. To judge him by modern standards or by Christian tests of honour to one's conscience would be manifestly unjust, because historically unfair. But let us judge him and his answer for a moment simply by the standards of his own age and religion. To do this, I wish to push him out of the picture for a moment, and insert one or two others in his place.

First of all, let us put in his place his own master, *Elijah,* that single-minded prophet who would truckle neither to man nor devil. How would Elijah have answered Naaman's query, "May I be allowed to serve Jehovah and yet bow when my master bows in the Temple of Rimmon?" He would have answered it, as we know he actually did answer it years before, "If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him." There are no two ways with Jehovah, and no divided allegiance. The Lord is a jealous God who brooks no rival, but demands the whole heart. If we know Elijah's mind at all, that is how he would have answered this dilemma! "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

Again, put in Elisha's place a man of an older generation and a dimmer light. How would *Moses* have faced a difficulty like this? We can hear that rich voice that thundered out the ten commandments rolling this forth: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength and with all thy body—aye, even with the bowing of thy head—and thou shalt not bow down thyself to any graven image." If we know the heart of Moses, that is how he would have answered!

Take one more instance, a man of a later day, *Daniel,* who had to face this dilemma at the peril of his soul. How would Daniel have answered Naaman's question? As we know, he actually had this problem thrust violently into his peaceful life. Would he, a Hebrew, owning allegiance to Jehovah, bow down before that graven image in Babylon? Daniel answered by word and deed: "I will rather be torn by the lions; I will rather go through leaping fire; I will rather die a hundred deaths; but I will not bow down before the image." If we know the mind of Daniel, that is how Daniel would have answered this conundrum!

But there in the presence of Gehazi, with that young man's searching eyes upon him, and his receptive mind open to his influence, Elisha mumbled a weak permission to compromise. We do not know whether he was influenced by the Syrian's grandeur and courtesy, or whether he argued that one might do in Damascus what one might not do in Samaria, or whether for a moment he lost his courage to stand by his own convictions and speak the truth. He might honourably have left the decision to Naaman's own conscience: for this was surely a concern that every honest man must settle for himself. But he granted an easy permission to the Syrian to act out a double part—to believe in the jealous and holy Jehovah, and yet go through the unseemly ritual of obeisance to Rimmon.

This is the leprosy of Elisha which immediately struck the weak and susceptible Gehazi, and led to his ruin. I cannot acquit the prophet of his own part in the tragedy that follows.

IV

Up to this moment of Elisha's vacillation and failure, Gehazi had been a blameless and honourable servant. He had been linked by the same intimate bond to his master, as student-companion and friend, as had linked Elisha to the great Elijah: for in the record (2 Kings iv. 43) the same word "minister" describes his relation to Elisha as describes Elisha's relation to his departed lord. In everything he had served Elisha with scrupulous honesty and faithfulness; and on some occasions, for instance with the Shunemite woman, his insight had surpassed his master's. Elisha himself had testified to this faithfulness, for according to one good translation, he calls him even in his anger "my heart," "my dear one." Certainly there had been no suggestion of disloyalty or profiteering in any of Gehazi's work for his master. Elisha's commendation of the young student had been generous. He had trusted him fully, and Gehazi had never failed.

But from the moment of his master's evident compromise, the young servant cracked like a nut under a wheel! The searching eyes of Gehazi, who had always thought the prophet beyond reproach and had placed him on a pedestal, noted this break of moral compromise—noted it and fell! We can easily guess how he reasoned. "My master can make his own principles elastic to suit the occasion; he can step down a little to err." It is certainly curious that Gehazi's first break follows immediately on the heels of Elisha's weakness!

I do not seek to excuse Gehazi, least of all do I seek to whitewash him or his trickery. His sin, like any other man's, is his own. But if we can understand trusting children who learn their follies at our feet, and whose wondering eyes see our ways and ape them, we can understand the blight that smote Gehazi. That master had been an idol, now he was only a chipped idol. The servant had seen Elisha vacillate on a point of principle and faith. He saw him hedge and weaken. And he argued, as all young and dependent people tend to argue, that what is good enough for his master is good enough for him. I hold that the first sin in this story is Elisha's sin, and that Gehazi's weakness sprang from his master's.

From the prophet's compromise which spread subtly to Gehazi and corrupted him, (the germ of the disease landing on a weak nature at a weak moment), our story turns back on itself and reverts to the physical leprosy, the leprosy that struck Gehazi.

V

I need not recall how the young man's thoughts tempted him to profit by Naaman's generous offer of gold and clothing. Elisha, somewhat haughtily and indignantly, had refused the Syrian's spontaneous and thoughtful gift. He stood on his dignity—always a poor platform—and slammed the door on Naaman's grateful heart. I wonder if he had any right to do this? In his narrow pride, he foreclosed the generous promptings of a big heart that had been touched to finer issues. It was easy for the prophet to say that he did not wish any man's gratuity as a return for what he had done. But there were two people whom a wiser man than Elisha would have remembered. On the one hand, he would have remembered Naaman, and would have given him the one thing a grateful heart longs to have—an opportunity to express itself and pour out its thanks! We recall how delicately Jesus allowed that sinning woman to empty her box of ointment upon Him. Though the whole incident was an awkward affair, especially in a watchful Pharisee's house, He yet allowed her to have what her heart prompted—the chance to tell an untellable thanks. But Elisha, churlish and ungallant, afraid perhaps of his reputation lest anyone should say he took bribes for his cures, dammed up the fine springs of Naaman's gratitude with a curt refusal. He did not know, narrow man, that we do wrong at any time to shut up a heart's gratitude. Let it flow out! That gratitude does two magnificent things—it eases the soul of the giver, and it enriches and gladdens the world by its spending. But the small-minded prophet, with no thought of Naaman's hurt, chose to flourish his own personal dignity like a flag. I cannot help thinking that his pocket might have been a good place for Elisha's pride!

The other person whom a bigger man might have remembered was his servant. As I have already remarked, I am not condoning Gehazi's trickery, but I cannot help seeing what may be justly said on his behalf. In the East, (on this point, by the way, read Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*), a prophet is a rather high and distant individual, for whom all the work and scrambling have to be done by some luckless servant or neophyte. Wandering prophets have no income except what the chance charity of the countryside may bestow on them; and Gehazi with his begging bowl, like other students, had to find clothes and food and the other necessaries for them both. Such grubby work is too lowly and common for a prophet! It was very fine, therefore, and sounded magnificent, for Elisha to wave a lordly hand, and say: "I want none of that Syrian's gold or clothing." I can imagine Gehazi muttering: "I wonder if my dear high-minded master knows that I have not two coppers in my pocket at this moment to buy us food for to-morrow." We can all be very high-minded if other people have to do the scrambling! There is no doubt that Naaman's gifts, if pleasantly received, would have made two people happy, Naaman and Gehazi. Elisha's foolish refusal only shows that it is a more difficult art in life to receive gracefully than give gracefully!

I claim that a better man than Elisha would have thought first of Gehazi and last about his own dignity. He would have thought also of Naaman and his choked gratitude. As it was, the prophet turned away, with his head in the air, expecting no doubt that his admiring servant would follow humbly and adoringly such a lordly master! I can see him now, strutting off with a sense of magnificent dignity. He would leave that proud Syrian and the humble Gehazi admiring him, a man beyond bribes and largesse! But all he left behind was *two hurt hearts!* So he walked off with more than a suspicion of melodrama.

I do not excuse Gehazi, for excuses do not excuse. When Naaman had departed a little way, he followed after him, no doubt with the plea in his mind that he needed money for their living, money, as it were, to keep the pot boiling! He lied to the noble Syrian about his master's change of mind. Yes! His master had thought the matter over, and would take gifts for the entertainment of some prophets who had chanced to visit them. Thereby, no doubt, he only further cheapened Naaman's view of Elisha, this aloof being who pretended to be so different from all other prophets, and yet could send his young servant sneaking back to take what he was not man enough to take himself. Doubtless, Naaman, with all his knowledge of men and things, smiled knowingly, and thought the dodge too obvious. But he gladly granted the request, and pressed gold and clothing on the deceitful servant. As I review the whole incident, the one admirable soul in the story is the Syrian!

Gehazi came back from his folly with Naaman's gold chinking in his wallet and Naaman's clothing hugged to his bare bosom. The prophet again looks small, for he sports with his servant as a cat plays with a mouse. He leads the young fool into deeper lying, one lie demanding a neighbour to keep it company. Then, with a hard note of iron in his voice, he pronounces Gehazi's doom, forgetting this man's eager services for him in days gone by. Could he not have given this young disciple, with such a record of allegiance behind him, the "benefit of a first offender's act?" Or would a reprimand not have been enough? Instead, we hear only the stiff steel in his voice as he cries, "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee." . . . He cured a stranger and smote his friend.

VI

Of the three people in the tale, the one I like least is Elisha. He is narrow-minded, boorish, thoughtless, and even vindictive. At least, I should call him vindictive, did I think for a moment that he had actually called down leprosy on his servant. Fortunately, I do not. I do not believe that the scourge struck Gehazi because Elisha pronounced and decreed it. God does not work His ordered world in that crazy way. I do not think for a moment that God allows any one of His prophets to pronounce such a blasphemous sentence.

I believe that Gehazi went out a leper, but not because that proud prophet decreed it. The record itself tells us how he went out a leper. He had handled Naaman's clothes and hugged them to his bare perspiring bosom. In his pathetic deceit, creeping up to his tent and bending himself double, he had strained the leper's garments to his skin. See him as he steals in and hides them in his tent! He had fingered the silks and the brocades and the satins, and had loved the "feel" of the fine things as he dressed himself with them in turn. And the leprosy of Naaman, on Naaman's clothes, had smitten him, as he clutched them to his breast. "*The leprosy of Naaman,*" said Elisha, "shall cleave unto thee." *And it was the leprosy of Naaman!*

VII

Is there anything to be said for our foolish and sinning young student?

By our standards, of course, we vote him only mean and dishonest, a sneak greedy of gear, who by his stealthy act shamed and defamed his master. But have we any right to judge him entirely by our standards, the standards that are ours because Jesus has lived and died?

Let me state simply what should be considered in defence of his memory.

1. He was not a servant or paid attendant, in our sense of that word "servant." He was a young student or disciple of the prophet, holding the same relation to Elisha as Elisha had held to Elijah—a junior assistant, an apprentice who followed his master of his own free will to learn his ways. Did he, when Elisha broke, learn his ways too well?

2. It is most important to remember that it was the recognised custom for prophets like Elisha *to accept fees or gratuities.* Elisha's refusal and his later indignation in this special instance have blinded us to the facts. Indeed, it was by such gratuities that the prophets lived! They accepted, and sometimes demanded, the gifts of the countryside for their upkeep. An interesting illustration of this is given us in the story of Saul, the son of Kish, when he is

searching for his father's strayed asses. His servant proposes that they should go and consult Samuel the Seer for guidance and help, but Saul answers that the prophet will certainly expect a present, and he, unfortunately, has no money with him. Whereupon the servant produces the quarter of a shekel as the prophet's gratuity. It should certainly be noted, therefore, that Elisha's refusal of Naaman's gratitude was purely accidental, and was due in this instance to some unexplained reason in the prophet's mind. His refusal of this special gift was a pose of independence, an independence that did not really exist. He would have taken bounty for the same services from anyone else, and had done so a hundred times. On this point there can be no doubt.

3. It should be noted also that Gehazi, naturally enough, could not understand Elisha's quite unusual and newly acquired delicacy of mind. He regarded his attitude as foolish squeamishness. Moreover, it was the servant's task entirely to collect these gratuities without any reference to his master, which he had constantly done in various ways throughout his apprenticeship. The servant was "lord of the commissariat." For, as we have already seen, the prophets were much too mighty people to be bothered with this grubby business, this "serving of tables!" Hence we always find them with their neophyte or disciple to do the scrambling for them. It is easy to understand, therefore, that Gehazi, with a dozen household concerns to worry him, regarded this compunction towards Naaman not only as foolish, but as a lost opportunity for their common purse. And who knows how empty that purse was at the moment? (Again I commend you to read

Kipling's *Kim* for a faithful picture of the scrambling work of a prophet's assistant.)

4. Naaman's pressure of the gifts and his evident chagrin at Elisha's refusal should be remembered in Gehazi's favour. The young man was taking nothing that was not usual, and nothing that was not freely offered! At least we are certain of one thing, that if he displeased Elisha, he brought some genuine pleasure to the Syrian's heart!

5. Elisha's anger at the end was chiefly wounded pride and unjustified resentment. As we know, Gehazi had done nothing wrong except disobey his master's unspoken order! Certainly, there was nothing wrong, as such, in the taking of gratuities. In any case, these gratuities were *his* concern, not the prophet's. No doubt, there was pique in Elisha's mind that the Syrian should return to Damascus with the thought that he, a prophet of Israel, wanted his silks and his money! To me, his spluttering anger is petty, self-righteous, and melodramatic. And I can never forget that he cured a stranger and cursed his friend.

6. No one should forget the last glimpse we have of Gehazi. In a later chapter, 2 Kings viii. 4, the King talks in the open air with this leper and questions him about the works of Elisha. (Some critics place this incident *before* Gehazi's leprosy, but there is no reason why the king should not speak to a leper in the open air.) Gehazi narrates fully and gladly all the glories of his old master, praising him with an unfeigned heart. There is not one glimpse of resentment or bitterness in the leper's soul. Though he

has been punished with a slow death, he is faithful to the prophet who cursed him, and he sings his praises from a heart untouched by bitterness. This note of bigness, to my mind, atones for much. And he passes out, returning good for evil, heaping coals of fire on Elisha's head. It is a great exit.

VIII

O my poor Gehazi, my heart is sorry for you! I am as sorry for you as for any sinner within the boards of the Bible. As I see you limping out into the dark, I am sure that the condemnation of the world is greater than you deserve. I hope that Elisha, your hard master, found someone as faithful to do his daily begging and provide him with clothes and food. I know that you erred. You wanted the money and the silks, and for them you deceived and you lied. I have heard since boyhood of your "mean deceit" and your squirming evasion when Elisha's cold eyes pinned you to the wall. But our modern moralists have been so busy denouncing you, that they have forgotten that your master may need their apology as deeply. He blasted you in his self-righteous anger: but then, it was this same man who blasted the little innocent children who playfully called him nicknames! You forgot that grim incident, Gehazi, and you forgot the kind of man you were serving, one whose hard goodness would never give a sinner a second chance. But you have paid for your folly—not, I thank God, as the world thinks, because your master scourged you in God's name with disease. But you have paid for your folly, as I too have often paid for mine.

For, O my poor Gehazi, if you will have Naaman's clothes, if by hook or by crook you will have Naaman's clothes, then you must take the risk that lies with these silken garments. There are many others of us who will have Naaman's clothes, and like you, we are ready to risk his leprosy! This young man here, he will have money. He will have money at all costs; he will have power at all costs; he will have fame at all costs. I wonder if he ever stops to count *at what cost?* There are more things than Naaman's clothes that carry their own leprosy; and to clutch the one is to risk the other.

I wonder if Naaman's silks are worth while—*at the price of Naaman's leprosy?*

AN EXONERATION OF CHRIST'S GENERATION

WHAT did Christ's generation think of him?

Many of us are inclined to argue that it does not matter at this time of day *what* his generation thought of Jesus: for they have been convicted, by all other generations, of the world's greatest historic misjudgment. They saw him, but did not see his majesty. They heard his voice, but missed his eternal message. They actually had this wonderful Lord in their midst, and they nailed him to a cross!

Others, on general grounds, question the worth of any generation's judgment of its own people; for each age is too near its great masters to see them in a true focus. Just as one should stand some distance off from a mountain peak to see its contour and proportion, so it needs the cooling passage of time for men to judge their fellows justly, without the distortion of anger or the bias of love.

Thus, at first sight, it may seem needless or worthless to ask what Christ's age thought of him. No doubt this is true so far as any justice to Jesus himself is concerned: for the world has finally given him its adoration, in spite of the pitiful treatment of the age in which he lived. But the enquiry may be necessary in justice not so much to him as to his maligned generation. Our anger at his rejection, and our revulsion from the manner and cause of his death have led us into some foolish wholesale views that do grave wrong to the people among whom he lived.

I

It is true to say, (that lonely cross is the final proof), that Jesus was rejected by his own generation. His message proved so unacceptable to the leaders of the nation, and seemed so subversive of their cherished ideals, that they arrested him, arraigned him before Pilate on a false charge, and by suborned witnesses procured his death. These were the conclusive facts on which St John based his famous indictment, "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*"

It is a pity, however, that those who quote this judgment as a general condemnation of Christ's generation, do not stay to finish the quotation. For the evangelist purposely added another clause, in the light of which the first can alone be properly interpreted. "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" It is a joy to know that countless numbers did receive him, and believed on his name. Indeed, it is by their passion, sacrifice, and loyalty that the world and the Church are what they are to-day.

In any case, it is time to realise that it is not possible to libel an age or a nation. One may libel certain definite individuals and bring the conduct for which they are personally responsible home to their account, like roosting birds. But it is not possible, and certainly it is not just, to arraign a whole people for the actions of a few. Even if these few were the official governors and rulers of the people, that does not implicate the whole nation itself. With us to-day, the action of our rulers might possibly implicate us, for we have the power to appoint or dismiss our rulers and review their actions; and by the power of the press we are in immediate touch with all their deliberations. But in Christ's day, the action of the rulers could not conceivably be regarded as a judgment on the nation; for the government was essentially aristocratic and ecclesiastical, and the people had no articulate voice either in appointing their rulers or reviewing their acts. In days when the idea of representative and responsible government had not even entered men's free dreams, the nation could not be held responsible for the deeds of its aristocratic princes.

According to the facts of history, Jesus was rejected not by a nation but by a *class,* the Priests and Pharisees. Even that broad generalisation is strained and inaccurate, for there were many of the Pharisees who were friendly and sympathetic to him and his work, and some, as we know, were his disciples in secret.

But beyond all this, it is not generally understood what an amazing success Jesus experienced among "his own." There were hundreds and thousands in Galilee who were influenced by him, believed in him, and loved him dearly. With the exception of that last week in Jerusalem, (which in the narratives occupies a place out of all proportion *in bulk,* though not in importance, to the rest of his fruitful ministry), Christ's work was pursued with wonderful friendliness and receptiveness. What happiness he had, what attentive crowds, what loyal friendships, what adoring followers! We think so much of the black enmity of the priests of Jerusalem, who hated him because he seemed to assail their religious system and invade their privileges, that we forget the countless homes throughout the land where he was welcomed, and the serenities of love that made him glad. I am sure it is altogether wrong to think of Jesus as meeting nothing but disappointment, misunderstanding, or rejection. If we could possibly cut out that last decisive week of growing hatred and enmity in Jerusalem that culminated in his cross, we might truly say that Jesus was crowned with more love and honour than any other reforming teacher! He had less hate, for instance, and more love than Socrates.

Further, let us remember that all the workers and eager servants who afterwards turned the world upside-down were "his own." We forget that he founded a bigger "school" of workers in his lifetime than any other teacher in the world. It is so easy to overlook the fact that during the whole Galilee mission, which comprised the greater part of his earthly ministry, there were bands of approved followers, seventy at one time, preaching his message and doing his work of grace. Let us remember that these people were *disciples,* convinced followers, preaching the kingdom and healing in Christ's name. We are apt to forget the continued work of those big bands of disciples, because at the end, as a deliberate policy, Jesus specially concentrated on the twelve Apostles. In the later part of the Gospels we are given a detailed account of that intensive training and teaching during the last months; but that does not mean for a moment that the other bands of true followers had ceased to believe in his name or had stopped preaching the kingdom. In our age of "campaigns," I wonder if there ever was a campaign just so thorough or so successful as our Lord's three years' ministry in Galilee?

Still further, (and this is forgotten most of all), "his own" were the great means for that astounding propagation of the Gospel all over the known world that is still our modern amazement. In one century, these people did more, under greater difficulties, than all the other centuries have done together. They went out (not only the twelve Apostles, but unguessed numbers like Stephen and Philip the Evangelist) to preach the gladness of the kingdom: and, as we know, they went out to *die!* And this is the great fact—that *wherever "his own" went, they went first to "his own."* We forget this, I fear, in the light of later hostility and persecution. What a welcome they received among the scattered Jews of the world! Paul tells us how hundreds believed, and shows the wonderful reception he received from his own brethren. We know that in certain cities he was opposed and persecuted by the Jews—but again, if you will observe, only by the ruling class. The great body of the common people (who in Christ's life heard him so gladly) gave his messengers the same reception in their needy soul. There can be no possible doubt that from the Jewish people came the first, the most passionate, and the finest Christians! "He came unto his own, *and his own received him gladly.*"

It was the ruling class (the Priests, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees) who plotted Christ's death and procured his crucifixion. Some of the Jerusalem mob, (they could not be numerous in that narrow street outside the Prætorium, and many even of these were strangers from all quarters at the Passover), called aloud in prejudice for Christ's death, primed by the priests in their midst. But to say that the *people of Jerusalem* put Jesus to death is quite untrue. The only "true bill" we can bring in is a charge against a section of the priests who, for envy and hatred, brought him before Pilate. It may be admitted, perhaps, that these priests, as God's official representatives, were, or should have been, in a special sense, "his own." In that sense, and only in that sense, "he came unto his own and his own received him not."

Thus we must acquit the people of any official historical guilt for the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. They loved him well and listened eagerly to his message.

II

We have seen then that Jesus received a wonderful reception from the common people of his own day.

In justice to his maligned generation, and incidentally in justice to himself and his own power, we must go further and ask ourselves if there are any indications in our records of what the mass of the people thought of Jesus. It is only fair to them that we should try to see how they regarded him and his message. If we do so, "searching the Scriptures," we shall find a remarkable fact—that they passed some wonderful judgments on him, which, to my mind, have never been bettered in any age.

In the first place, we are pointedly told that they were openly astonished at his *unique authority*. In order to show exactly what they meant by this judgment they made an apt contrast, the significance of which we must not miss. They remarked that he spoke and taught "with authority and not as the Scribes." From our knowledge of the situation, we can estimate what this comparison meant to their minds. To put it in an epigram, they noted that the Scribes taught *from authority,* Christ *with authority.* Their ordinary teachers spoke from authorities (in the plural): Jesus spoke from some single source of inward assurance.

Those religious lawyers (perhaps like all lawyers!) loved to quote precedents and opinions, and referred constantly to the dictum of this Rabbi and the dictum of that. They lived in other men's minds, and were so dubious of the truth that they could say nothing from their own conviction. Even when driven into a corner, they would state no precise opinion of their own, but wriggled out on the back of confusing precedents and quotations. As a result, the people had no clear leading or light in the perplexities of their moral and spiritual life. Duty (a responsible soul's first concern) was in the eyes of the Scribes a teasing jumble of petty injunctions and prohibitions, with no big principles or motives to give an honest man any personal certitude. How they split hairs about legal and verbal differences, until the long-suffering people, and especially all morally anxious souls, were bamboozled and mystified, and felt that righteousness was a matter only for the learned and not for the common man in his home and business!

But his generation could not help noticing how different Jesus was from all other teachers in their midst. I claim that their testimony to this is a magnificent testimony to themselves. They noted, for instance, a difference in his *manner.* He spoke directly, plainly, and unambiguously. He spoke to *all,* and he spoke of the *biggest things* to all. He taught, moreover, to be understood, as if the message in his heart was not for a select *intelligentzia,* or esoteric circle, but for those of simple faith, the man in his trade, the woman in her home, and even the child in its day-dreams.

They noticed, further, that he spoke with direct and immediate assurance of truth. His message was his own message, direct from God, and was delivered in the certitude of personal knowledge. He never quoted what anyone else said. In the last resort, these were his final words, "Verily, verily, *I* say unto you." Once or twice, it is true, he remarked, "Ye have heard it said," or "Moses hath said." But then, quick as a flash, he added, "*But I say unto you.*" And when he had said it, his word was so direct, so immediate, and so luminous, that no one in the audience could mistake either his meaning, his intention, or his power.

Now, everybody in his own generation remarked this and commented on it. I say "everybody," for even his enemies remarked it, and hated him for it. It seemed as if the dominant note that all kinds of men and women heard in Jesus was this clear mastery and this innate authority. The multitudes, hungry for food in their spiritual famine, seemed to feel that he spoke with a new directness to their puzzled hearts—on the one hand, *direct from God through his own soul,* and on the other hand, *direct to man in his deep need.*

Do we give that benighted generation sufficient praise that they noted and recorded an amazing thing like this? For it is this authority in Jesus, which they plainly observed, that gives his teaching, then and now, the quality of a new revelation from the heart of God to the heart of man. There can be no doubt whatever that the crowds of his own day recognised his power and in some good fashion assessed its quality. They saw that his message was from his own soul and God. It had nothing by rote, at second-hand, or by tradition, but was a *revelation,* something new, direct, immediate, and sure. Thus their judgment is a clear testimony to his unerring moral and spiritual insight, as revealing as a shaft of light, and to his fearlessness in proclaiming the truth as from God. Their own Scribes (how could they help noticing it?) were mere casuists compared with Jesus, dealing with trivial rules, exceptions, modifications, and pin-point, hair-splitting distinctions. But Jesus stated his big living principles of positive conduct, and did not deal with the *least* that one can get off with, but with the *most* and the *highest* that one should do. He gave them regulative ideals instead of ideal regulations.

Thus his own generation (give them this credit) saw clearly that he did not need to grope his way to moral truth, waveringly and fumblingly, as their own Scribes did. He spoke about God and God's will as a personal revelation: *he knew God.* When he spoke about moral conduct, they seemed to grasp that his was the final word. To them, his message was like light: you never need to prove light, you know it. It was like power: you cannot define power, you feel it. It was like truth: there is something instinctive in us that rises up and greets truth as self-evident.

This, then, is how they recorded their impression: *"He spoke with authority."* They felt this mysterious and indefinable quality in our Lord, as we feel it to-day, in all ethical certainty. This, I hold, is a judgment of Christ and his message which we have not been able to improve. Indeed, when we wish to define the power of Jesus, we take their words as a final summary of his quality. I think it is only fair that we should admit that this judgment by his own generation regarding him and his work has never been surpassed.

III

Further, Christ's generation, in its puzzled way, recorded a second judgment equally honourable to itself and Jesus. We read that they discerned one quality of our Lord and his work which they and we, for lack of a better term, might call his *uniqueness* or *originality*.

It would be easy to collect some impressive instances of this judgment by his generation. I shall limit myself only to two or three.

St Mark tells us in his opening chapter that when the gathered crowds heard Jesus speak of his kingdom and of God, they cried out in amazement, "*What new doctrine is this?*" The emphasis in that remark is quite obviously on the word *new*. The people felt that in this preacher and in his message there was something fresh, even alarmingly fresh, something that broke away from all previous ideas about God, duty, and the soul.

Again, in chapter vi, the same evangelist notes that the people exclaimed, "*From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this that is given unto him?*" Here, again, there is the startled recognition that Christ's teaching was wholly underived from any known sources, and that his "wisdom" could certainly not be explained in terms of the past. It is the plain acknowledgment that they regarded his teaching as not only original, but even revolutionary.

Once more, St John remarks that the Priests and Pharisees, the custodians of God's past messages, were dumbfounded at his words, and asked with amazement, "*Whence hath this man letters, having never learned?*" This does not mean that they were astounded merely at his cleverness or his ability, or even at his inconvenient knowledge of the Bible. That, of course, is implied; for they wondered how he, who had never been at the recognised "schools," could possess this broad and exact knowledge of Scripture. But it implies also sheer amazement at his *interpretation* and *insight,* and also at the daring with which on occasion he actually supplemented the Old Testament, or even set it aside.

There is no doubt that his own age, friends and foes alike, recognised that Christ's message about God and the human soul was a new and original thing. Actually, it was the fact that it was so original and so underived from the past, that led the leaders to hate him, and in the end to put him to death. They feared his message as ultimately subversive of all they represented. They saw, as clearly as we see, that this was the parting of the ways, and unless they could suppress this man, their ancient system was endangered. So they made the common blunder of thinking that the best way to get rid of the teaching was to get rid of the teacher!

It has to be admitted by all fair people that his own generation regarded Jesus as superbly, even puzzlingly, original. This was their plain judgment. *Should we not give them credit for it?* I think, indeed, that they admitted this fact much more fully and generously than many people are inclined to do to-day. We meet critics in our own time who exult in showing just how much of Christ's teaching can be paralleled from other sources—something that Hosea or Plato or Seneca has said. We fail to see that even if we could do this, it would not affect Christ's originality. It would, indeed, be a remarkable thing if we could not gather from other sources many parallels of things Jesus has said; for God has given all mankind the religious instinct and inspiration, and we have been dimly fumbling after moral and spiritual truth all through the centuries. In any case, Jesus did not profess to bring in something that was not there before, but only to perfect what we have been groping after since man was man.

Even if one could parallel every saying of Jesus from other sources, would that affect his originality? We have lately discovered that Daniel Defoe, in writing *Robinson Crusoe,* used an obscure Dutch story which was written round the same theme and situation. But that does not affect any sensible person's notion of Defoe's originality; for he took what was dead and gave it life. We know nowadays that Robert Burns, in these wonderful lyrics and songs that are the classic expression of our common emotion, used the rhymes and melodies that were common property up and down the Scottish countryside. But no one thinks that Burns is any the less original because of that. In writing the Waverley Novels, Sir Walter Scott appropriated everything on which he could lay his moulding fingers. Does any wise man think that this affects Scott's original genius? In its motives and climax, *Macbeth* is taken from an old uninspired chronicle. Do we consider Shakespeare any less original because he gathered his dramatic material from earlier sources?

Even if it were true, (which it is not), that one could parallel Christ's teaching from other sources, yet the judgment of his own generation would stand, that he was a new original source of truth from God. Undoubtedly his own age saw this, and admitted it fully. They recognised that everything in Jesus that matters to the world, (his vision, his outlook, his truth about God, and his message to man's soul), is his own direct and peculiar gift to us from the Father. Indeed, I sometimes think that they saw what some of us fail to see—that his uniqueness lay not only in what he said, but in what he was! His life in all its moral perfection and in its absolute dependence on God was his greatest originality.

I am glad that his own generation, so often maligned, hailed this and admitted it fully. Is it not time that we gave them credit for their wonderful appreciation? This recognition of his uniqueness is a judgment of our Lord that has never been bettered.

IV

Our records have preserved another appreciation of Jesus by the men and women of his own day that should be observed by us with particular delight. St Luke makes the following comment on the popular impression of Christ's ministry: "*And all bare him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth.*"

That phrase "words of grace" does not mean only gracious, kindly words, contrasting perhaps with the harshness and dictatorial bluntness of the Scribes and Pharisees. That is suggested, no doubt. The mere winsomeness of Christ's speech, with his loving regard for everybody, must have been a charm to the crowds that beleaguered him. How he laboured to make his message plain and simple for the untutored hearer, and how graciously he spoke to any inquirer! His very parables, these gems of literary clarity, must have been a joy to those people who were bludgeoned by the Scribes' pomposity and verbal abstractions. Moreover, in his treatment of the people, he did not scold them or despise them because they were unlettered and simple folk, but treated every puzzled questioner with patience and charity. There are countless incidents to show how gracious he was to ignorant people. How could they help being touched by his courtesy?

But far deeper than that, the people felt the essential *message of redeeming grace* that lay at the back of his words. What they noted was not only a question of the manner or "manners" of the messenger, but of the content of his message. The old hard legalistic notions of God were wholly absent from his preaching. He spoke of God, first and last, as Father, as a God of love, mercy, tenderness, and pardon. It was not that he emphasised the laws of God's righteousness less than the Pharisees did. Indeed, he spoke of the justice and even the anger of a righteous God more than any legalist ever had done. No one, for instance, could make any mistake about his parables of judgment, of his warnings against sin and indifference. It may even be said that Jesus did more to exalt God's penal judgments and his essential *wrath* than any Pharisaic system could ever do. But beyond this, about this, and mellowing this, was his message of the welcoming, forgiving, redeeming heart of God the Father. We to-day who are so familiar, perhaps even so fatally familiar, with the mercy of the Gospel, can scarcely realise the amazing cheer and inspiration that came to that legalistic age with the first message of Jesus. His view of God was a revelation, (his pardon and restoration), especially as it affected the outcast and fallen sinners who were so openly excluded from the mercies of the Jewish Church. That God could so immediately and so fully forgive a repentant sinner, as was shown in the parable of the Father and the Prodigal Son, was a doctrine of grace that must have moved his age with a joyous astonishment we can never understand. And the puzzlement of the Elder Brother in the story is only a proof that the official legalism of the day could not grasp the full grace of the message.

But, nonetheless, his own age noted and hailed the grace of his message as "good news." Multitudes followed him with joy: the record says that the common people heard him gladly. Not only were they pleased when he so brilliantly refuted the Pharisees and turned aside all their dialectic obstructions, but they took the big message of God's love to their own hearts. That people such as Matthew, the outcast Publican, should be among his chosen Twelve, and that a man like Zacchæus or a woman like the Magdalene were among his ordinary friends, is sufficient proof that the sinners heard him gladly and responded to his mesage of grace. I repeat that there can be no doubt at all that the multitude of his age received him, welcomed him, and followed him. He came unto his own, *and his own received him with passionate adoration.*

V

I wish to ask if the judgments passed on Jesus by his own generation have ever been surpassed? I have not quoted any of the dozens of private assessments recorded of individuals, such as Peter's avowal and the final cry of Thomas. But if we consider only those general criticisms by the public to which I have referred, we may well ask—have we with all our appreciation of Jesus ever got beyond them? Do they not represent some of the finest things that our age or any age can say about Jesus? Are their judgments not final things?

If we admit this, (and how can we deny it?), we must in honesty return to the statement with which I began.

We cannot libel a nation or a generation for the sins of a few. A few priests put him on a cross, but hundreds of others put him on a throne. We call him, for instance, the *Man of Sorrows.* There is no doubt that in that last week and on his cross he was indeed, and will ever be, the *Man of Sorrows*—sorrows so deep that we shall never plumb them. But there is also no doubt that during his full three years' ministry, he was the *Man of Joys.* He had happiness from the reception of the people of Galilee that must have made his heart sing. There were homes, such as those in Bethany, where he was the honoured and loved guest of an adoring affection. If we say that at the end the multitudes forsook him, we must remember that in a certain sense he also deliberately forsook the multitudes. He retired from them and took his Twelve apart from great intensive training. He had to put them to school and college to prepare them for the great work of the kingdom. It is noteworthy how often he withdrew himself to desert places, away from the eager crowds, to perfect his work with the Apostles. I think it may safely be said that though many forsook him when he began to speak about the sufferings of the Messiah and show that his kingdom was not a temporal power, yet he always held the affection of the people of Galilee among whom all his work, with the exception of a few weeks, had been wrought.

Nothing but prejudice can hinder us from seeing that Jesus was put to death not by the people but by the enmity and jealousy of a limited class. And let us remember that even among that guilty class he had lovers like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa. That class, no doubt, was the class of power, who by their position nominally represented the nation. But we must be very chary of how we speak about anyone "representing" the nation in those autocratic days! Was there, in fact, any "representation" at all? That class, also, was the one section of the people who *ought* to have considered his message fairly, and given him a welcome as the messenger of God. Perhaps also, we may say that this class, being God's priests, was truly and specially "his own." They represented the rulers of the Church of God: into their hands was given the care of God's kingdom. In that sense, "his own" rejected him, and in that sense alone.

It is quite idle to point to the crowd in Jerusalem who cried aloud for his crucifixion, and assert that in this case the people publicly condemned him. As I have hinted in a previous sentence, that crowd was drawn from every odd corner of the globe, and was composed of hundreds of "passionate pilgrims" who had come to Jerusalem for the ancient Feast. These visitors did not know Jesus; even the ordinary mob of Jerusalem did not know him, for he was a most infrequent visitor in their city. These strangers in the capital, on the morning of Christ's trial, were primed by the bitter priests to call for his death. How can we blame them, with our easy strictures, when we know how they were deluded and misled? They were informed, by their own priests and spiritual guides, that definite witnesses had given evidence that this man had uttered threats against the Holy Temple, had threatened to lay it low, and had claimed to put an end to their religious system and its ancient privileges. But even that deluded crowd, (and not many of them, for the narrow street in front of the Prætorium could not hold many), cannot possibly represent the "nation." The fact, I think, remains unassailable that the great body of the common people of his own day—let us give them this deferred credit—received their Lord and ours with a great reception and heard him gladly. And their popular judgments of him are their undying glory.

Finally, let us never forget what we have already mentioned, that "his own" in uncounted numbers became the great preachers and ambassadors of his Gospel. Most of the missionaries of note in the New Testament were Jews who loved and served Jesus—and died for him! They were the Church's founders, messengers, ambassadors, and apostles. And throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe these loving countrymen of his became the first Christians and founded the early churches. In the deepest of all senses, therefore,—even in spite of that cross to which the Priests and Pharisees doomed his body—*he came unto his own, and* (*praise be to God*) *his own received him gladly.*

IN DEFENCE OF THE ELDER BROTHER AND THE PHARISEES

THERE have been many distortions, some foolish, some bitter, of Christ's picture of the Elder Brother. Has any character in the New Testament suffered more from the "slings and arrows" of outrageous criticism? He has been assailed by the good and the evil alike, by the saint and the sinner—the sinner judging him by what he seems to be, the saint by what he fails to be.

In spite of his undoubted worth, he is certainly one of the most friendless persons in the New Testament. How few people have ever raised their voices even to praise his honourable qualities! Actually, evil men have hated him for these qualities, and good men have forgotten them. As a natural result, he is one of the lonely men of the Bible, lonely because of his solid virtues—not bad enough for the bad, or good enough for the good.

I do not claim that we have failed to give him any love that may have been his due. He does not earn love. But I do suggest that we have failed to give him the respect and appreciation he undoubtedly deserves, the respect that Jesus Himself so generously accords him.

I

For the sake of clearness in judging the man and seeing our Lord's estimate of him, a fair reader should note two things at the outset.

1. This Elder Brother is the centre, or at least the dramatic climax, of the story. It was to portray him and consider his conduct that the tale was told. He is not in any sense an addendum or afterthought on the part of Jesus. Everything is specially planned to lead up to him and his conduct, as a natural climax of shock and recoil. Because of this fact, we may say in passing that the only title of the parable that is not strictly justified is our common one, "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." So far as the *lessons* of the story are concerned, the Prodigal is an accident. He is the occasion of the parable, not its purpose. His experiences are not related for their own sake, but only to show one thing—how two other people, the father and the brother, reacted to him on his return home. From its purpose, therefore, and from its historical setting, the parable is clearly the story of the Elder Brother. Perhaps, the ideal title should be "The Parable of the Contrasted Welcomes."

2. In his sketch of this man, Jesus has given us his considered judgment and appreciation of that great religious order, the Pharisees. This becomes immediately obvious if we glance at the opening verses of the chapter, which serve as a general preamble to the three kindred stories. There we learn that our Lord had accorded a gracious reception to the publicans and sinners, and had made them His friends, even visiting and dining at their homes. At this outrageous leniency, so opposed to the ideas of the day, the Pharisees were shocked. We read that they murmured, blaming Jesus for religious laxity. In defence, (to justify His own work and explain His message of grace), He told this story.

In it He showed the happy welcome and the quick smile God gives to repentant sinners, and on the other hand, the chilly conduct of the Pharisees as portrayed in the Elder Brother. There is no doubt, therefore, that in the historical setting the Elder Brother is the true climax of the story. In him Jesus was holding up a mirror for the ordinary Pharisee to see his own face.

II

Few people in the New Testament have been so contemptuously judged as this Elder Brother. He is regarded as the stock illustration of what a religious man should not be! Strangely enough, as we have already hinted, the harshest judgments come from two sets of people who are at opposite poles from each other. On the one hand, the man of the world, remembering his kinsman the prodigal, miscalls the brother as a heartless fellow, eaten up with spiritual conceit, and merciless to the unfortunate. On the other hand, the gentle Christian, who spends his life in all kinds of redemptive service, thinks of him as the epitome of everything that is finally unlike Christ, a man who is not only unready to seek the strayed lambs, but actually drives them further afield. Thus the Elder Brother has stood between two opposing fires, as a target of contempt.

We may summarise the popular criticism of this man in a few brief clauses—a self-righteous prig; a jealous soul who grudges his repentant brother a welcome or a second chance; one who has never been tempted himself and cannot understand a sinner's fall or a sinner's tears; a man of negative goodness, with outward correctness of life, but lacking any of the charm of that positive holiness which loves to heal; a puritanical bigot with closed mind and bitter censure; a hypocrite who professes to love God but does not love his fellow-men; a cold, critical person, faultily faultless and unjustly just; the essence of self-pleased respectability that lives for itself alone and has only a chilling attitude towards the constructive work of God's grace.

Is this a sufficient picture of the man as Jesus sketched him in the story?

III

Let us ask ourselves what kind of person is portrayed in the parable.

In estimating him as an individual, we should remember that he is the subject of two quite deliberate contrasts. Our view of him will depend on which of the two contrasts we stress.

The common mistake in judging him lies in the fact that most people *contrast him only with the father!* Without any doubt our Lord intended us to make this comparison. Indeed, He told the story that we should make it. We are asked to compare the unstinted joy of the parent with the churlish and abusive reception of the brother. In face of this contrast, of course, the Elder Brother stands condemned. *But who does not?* Let us realise what this contrast implies. The father in the story undoubtedly represents God or Jesus Himself. Our implied contrast, therefore, means that we are comparing, not man with man, but man with God! Is there any one of us, even after these centuries of Christianity, who can stand the white light of such an ordeal?

That the contrast is really with God and not man, with divine grace and not human frailty, is the big fact that most of us forget. If the Elder Brother is condemned as pitiable or contemptible, it is not because we have contrasted him with his brethren, or even with the best human attainment of his own age, but with the matchless glory of divine love and tenderness. We are not contrasting shadow with shadow, but shadow with light!

I am amazed that so few people seem to realise what they are doing when they compare the brother with the father. They make the contrast lightly, and say: "See what a poor worm this fellow is, and how he contrasts with the big heart of the parent!" But though Jesus was fully entitled, by His own conduct, to make this comparison, are we justified in stressing it as we commonly do—that is, to judge the brother's character *as a man compared with his fellow-men?* Is it not fair to remember that in placing the father and the brother side by side we are not comparing like with like or human with human? It is so important for us to grasp this, if we would estimate the Elder Brother justly, that I risk the charge of repetition in stressing it. Jesus Himself is not judging this man as compared with the whole range of mankind or with the best results of the human spirit, but only as compared with the flawless mercy of the heart of God! Too often, in estimating the man's character relative to other men, we forget this essential point.

IV

In view of the world's judgment, as the result of this contrast, there is something further that should be said.

Many people fail to observe the respect and honour which Christ accords to this man and his record. He admits so generously and openly the worth of his previous life and conduct. He praises him, in the father's words, for his fidelity and loyalty, for his years of hard work and application, for his attachment both to his father and the farm, for the honour of his clean record, and for the self-sacrifice and restraint that made his life so noble, when others, equally bound, had selfishly broken all links of love and duty. An observant reader will not fail to see that there are some touches in Christ's portraiture that make very beautiful reading.

Indeed, there is only one point in which our Lord seems to take the Elder Brother to task. It is a great point, I allow, perhaps the greatest, *the lack of a forgiving welcome.* Without question, this is a bitter failure on the brother's part. But it is a failure, let us once more remember, not as compared with other good men or other good systems, but as compared with the unfathomable tenderness of God.

Furthermore, we commonly find fault with this man's severity of mind. Are we quite fair in stressing this in our judgment either of the Elder Brother or the Pharisee? I think we should remember that this strict and critical attitude to the Prodigal's sin was in no sense peculiar to the Elder Brother as a type or to the Pharisees as a sect. It was a mark rather of all forms of moral goodness of that day, as it is, indeed, of any day. Most types of human goodness inevitably tend to become severe, often justifiably severe. On the other hand, they are so alarmed about sin and its ruin, and on the other hand, they are so concerned for the honour and majesty of God's moral laws of righteousness, that almost inevitably they tend to become strict. Human goodness is so afraid lest it palliate or condone sin, and thus lessen the rigour of the claims of righteousness, that it invariably becomes more austere than it otherwise would.

It is a historical fact that the more passionately "good" our human systems are and the more they seek to uphold a high idea of God's moral law and a true view of the enormity of sin, the more in proportion have they tended to become severe and critical. All honour to them, for it is a noble fault! This severity is no special mark of the Elder Brother or the Pharisee: it is rather a mark of human limitation itself. In any case, we must admit that it is all to the honour of our best human systems that they *do* seek to vindicate God's moral order and frown upon sin! This attitude may be foolish and short-sighted, but it deserves its own credit. It has kept the sanctity of moral law in our midst as a great ideal, and has cleansed as with salt our public and social life. It is so easy to condone sin and make it a light thing. Many of the systems or people who imagine they are charitable are more lax than gentle! On the other hand, such people as the Elder Brother and the Pharisees were so solicitous for God's moral demands on life, that they could not see how sin could be pardoned without probation and discipline. How could a just God justify the ungodly? If *we* understand that a little, it is only in the light of a certain lonely Cross!

V

Why then did the Elder Brother omit the welcome?

He was angry and puzzled at the light-hearted way in which the sinner's past seemed to be overlooked. How could this apparent laxness square with a strict moral code and with the sanctity of righteousness? Was there no punishment for a broken law and no recognition of rectitude? I think we should give credit for the puzzled outlook of this good man who wished to see God's moral judgments vindicated. He could not understand that the Prodigal, who had wasted everything in riotous living, should slip back, without a word said, into all the love and privileges of the home he had ruined. *If so, what was the ultimate difference between goodness and sin?*

We need not sneer at this stern and even critical goodness, for much of our modern thought is leavened by the same theory. Our conception of civil and criminal law, even under Christian influence, is founded on this. The strong churches to-day are those with a high threshold, who exalt God's law and sovereignty, and make sin a desperate thing, desperate enough to need a cross to redeem it. It has taken the Christian world centuries to understand how God can forgive sin freely to a repentant man, and yet maintain the majesty of His broken laws. Many Christian people to-day cannot understand this mercy of God, without some accompanying theory of penance and good works! In any case, let us remember that Christ's own attitude to the sinner was nothing less than *revolutionary*. It broke with every past tradition: and the God He revealed was literally a new God.

Thus the severity of the Elder Brother (or of the Pharisee) was not pride in his own attainments or any spiritual conceit; nor was it ill-will at the sinners and wastrels personally, but it was a puzzled attempt to exalt the majesty of the moral laws of righteousness. The man felt that the claim of a sober, honourable life and the appeal of goodness would be endangered, unless the breach of the law were punished and God's majesty vindicated. That is why the Elder Brother and the Pharisee demanded probation and discipline. It is why so many other "good" people to-day demand the same thing.

Even more so, it should be remembered that this quality of charity and forgiveness, which belonged so fully to the father and was lacking in the brother, is *the one divine quality that makes God so amazingly God to us!* That He can hate sin as He does, and yet forgive as He does, is our unending wonder. Even to the good man, often because he is so good and is so interested in upholding the moral code, this is the bit in God he can never comprehend. It passes all his understanding: in the end, he simply accepts it as a glorious paradox of God's fatherhood.

Let us remember, therefore, that the Elder Brother failed only as the best human goodness has always failed. Further, let us consider that it was his passion for the worth of the moral code that blinded his eyes. And finally, let us never forget that the contrast by which he is made to seem so meagre and petty, is a contrast not with other good men and other good systems, but with the faultless and amazing mercy of God Himself.

By this contrast, the Elder Brother fails. By this contrast, the Pharisees fail. But by this contrast, who does not fail?

VI

There is a second implied contrast in the story, and Jesus makes it as deliberately as the first. In fact, the details of the earlier section of the parable and certain parts of the speech of the father are only an elaboration of this very real contrast.

In one sense, this contrast of brother with brother is the only one that we, as stumbling Christians, can legitimately stress without self-condemnation. The other contrast with the father was a contrast between people who lived and thought on different planes, the divine and the human. This is a contrast between people on the same plane, like with like. It is a contrast between two equals, children of the same home and the same love, who had equal gifts, equal rights, and equal opportunities. It is here that the Elder Brother comes into his own meed of honour and praise. As we compare his life with his brother's in quality and kind, we see in a true perspective what a noble and worthy man he is. Let us see what Jesus tells us of this man's record.

In the first place, he is shown as the mainstay and comfort of his father through a loyal and dutiful life. When his self-centred brother cast his lusting eyes abroad and dissolutely lost himself in his crude passions, this man stood by the farm with a patience and a fidelity that are only admirable. The Prodigal packed his kit and went off to play the devil with himself, wounding his old father's heart; but this son remained loyal and helped the father through years of steady service. There is no doubt of the real *goodness* and *love* of his heart in this faithful attachment. Many people are faithful from a sense of duty or a feeling of honour; but it was a deep affection both for his father and the work that held him. That is undoubted, both of the Elder Brother and of the Pharisee.

It is not fair to say, as a friend of mine once said, that this fellow had not the heart of a mouse, and had no hankering for adventure! Such an assumption is entirely gratuitous. Because a good man holds himself in check and keeps himself decent, it does not follow that he has no passions and desires. All it argues is, that he is big enough and man enough to *master* and *control* his desires! Moreover, we know positively that this son had his longings like anyone else. He complained later to his father that *he* had never received a kid that he might make merry with his friends, hinting, obviously, that he had often desired it! But he had deliberately lived a quiet, restrained, and self-sacrificing life, the more restrained, perhaps, because he remembered the bitter mess his brother had made by his indulgence.

The point to notice here is that this brother, like many other men of restraint, was just as human and as hot as the young brother who let his passions override him. He had the same urge in his blood and the same desire for youth's eager adventures. I protest against the common idea that only those have strong passions and longings who *give in* to their temptations! It is contemptible to hear how some men and women who have succumbed to their passions suggest that they were overborne beyond all possible limits, and that good people are only clean because they have no redness in their blood and no flame in their heart. And the presumption always is that the sinner fell through the massive weight of the onslaught and not through the weakness of his own heart. But passion is not measured by its easy flow, but by a soul's resistance and victory. I have no doubt that, like any of us, the Elder Brother had many a sore tussle between desire and duty. But to whatever cause we trace the outcome, he manfully suppressed himself and stuck by the old man and the farm.

The Elder Brother is not pictured by Jesus as in any way *colourless,* or as a prim, untempted soul! His very anger at the end is a proof of his temperament and of the fierce fires he had banked down. To whatever source we attribute the fact, let us admit thankfully that he at least had some notion of duty and some touch of self-sacrifice. He was man enough to crucify his passions and himself on the cross of love and duty.

VII

Thus in the picture Jesus has given us, this brother is shown to be as faithful and honourable a son as any father could desire. I like to think that at the crisis of the parable he was "*in the field.*" This is a fine touch of our Lord's, picturing this honest man out on the farm, doing a full day's job, attending to the routine of necessary work, and making the duties of the homestead as easy as possible for that white-haired old man. We are not fair, in any sense, to the Elder Brother unless we admit this fully. Sum up, therefore, his magnificent record—years of faithfulness against the other man's years of selfish neglect and sin; service for the farm (the kingdom) without which it would have greatly suffered; loyalty and love for the father whom the other had deserted and forgotten; an unblemished and upright character that must have been a joy to his father's heart.

I am amazed that people can admit this and yet discount it with so much evident prejudice. If we take such a critic as Professor Bruce, who is usually so fair in judgment, we shall see how preconceived views may bias a sound man's verdict. In his *Parabolic Teaching of Christ,* Professor Bruce sums up the Elder Brother after this fashion: "He is a dutiful, diligent, methodical, plodding, prosaic, uninteresting man." Where did Dr Bruce learn that this brother was either *prosaic* or *uninteresting?* Are not these insulting adjectives due to the ridiculous idea that anyone who leads a quiet, ordered life is necessarily prosaic and uninteresting? This is the subtle but silly tribute that many good people thoughtlessly pay to what they call the romance of sin! They seem to imagine that the strolling life of the prodigal is infinitely more "romantic" than the quiet, strong life of a good citizen. That this is undoubtedly Professor Bruce's idea is revealed in another amazing remark. "Prosaic himself, he could never excite gushes of emotion, lyric states of soul, in his fellow-men. The fountains of emotion are opened, not by moral mediocrity or correctness, but by wickedness repentant or by heroic goodness." This is tragic stuff, when we think it out. It panders to our pathetic misjudgments. What is *moral mediocrity* or *heroic goodness?* If there is any difference, it is only a matter of limelight, nothing more; for there is as much heroism of the real stuff in a boy who refuses to tell a lie as in the more dramatic exploit of a Crusader. There is no spiritual difference between the two, except what our twisted perspective sees. And further, where is there more glory in "wickedness repentant" than in "moral correctness?" There may be more splash and more apparent drama, but not more greatness or appeal. I suppose that the most "morally correct" person in history was Jesus, and certainly there was no "wickedness repentant" in Him. Therefore, by our tests, Jesus was the most prosaic and uninteresting person in the world. To say this is only to reduce our common idea to its logical or illogical absurdity! Oh, let us be done with this tragic heresy! The only romantic and Godlike thing in this world is "*moral correctness*,"—honour, love, duty, and service. And let us stop sneering at a correct man as either prosaic or uninteresting. Some people would have us think that romance lies in *chaos* and not in *law,* in breaking bounds, not in keeping them. If they introduced their idea of romance into the running of God's universe of law, there would be no world left in which to have their "romance"! Good people, unfortunately, have done more to cast a false glamour over a breach of law than all the sinners in the world combined.

VIII

There are moments when my heart is full for this honourable son as I thank him for the long, rich years of faithful duty and clean living. Whatever we may think of his conduct in the one great particular, at least there is this to be said for him that in a selfish and greedy world he had not treated duty like dirt. He had not trampled on a father's love or turned his back on a forgotten home. Moreover, it is worth observing that all the fine things that make life livable are done by quiet and faithful people like this. They make a good world possible and keep it sweet. They are the backbone of the state, the church, and the home. They keep society decent and preserve public tone and flavour. There would be little morality in business, progress in civilisation, or honour in human relations without these quiet heroes, who convert homely duty into a glowing romance. They are the salt of the earth, men of credit and trust, reliable, true to their bond, as sure as the laws of honour by which they live.

Whereas the Prodigal, for whom there is so much sickly sentimental slush . . . well, is there any real comparison between the two men either in character or results? The younger son is not in the story for his own sake. Jesus never threw any false glamour over a life like his. He never preached sin as a great adventure, or even as the normal process through which a young fool must go to sow his wild oats. The Prodigal's story of sin and selfishness is only told to show the dazzling and unmerited lovingkindness of God. There is no real romance about this selfish lad who cared for nothing except his own lusts. There never is any romance in sin like that, though our modern oblique novelists would have us believe that there is. The only true romance lies in the quiet and beautiful faithfulness of the Elder Brother—and alas! in the bleached homes and hearts that the Prodigal leaves behind him, and the aches and the longings that hurt like death!

IX

So far (let us observe this) we have here an accurate and just picture of the Pharisees. Jesus has done them particular honour. As the parable admits, they were unquestionably the best people of their time. We use the word "Pharisee" nowadays brutally and foolishly as a synonym for a hypocrite or a canting liar. This is unjust as well as historically unsound, and Jesus here drives the lesson home. For we have the picture of the good Pharisees in this good Elder Brother. These people were God's best folk in that day, loving purity in worship and faith, living upright lives of honour and duty, and standing staunch against the irreligion of the sinners and the equal irreligion of the Sadducees who laughed at holy things. The Pharisees were actually the Puritans of their own age who stood by God, religion, and good living against the aggression of materialism and sin. Like the Elder Brother, they had honestly, if narrowly, served God and His Kingdom, working daily on His farm. It is hard to conceive what public life and morals, in Christ's day, might have become without the saving salt of this great order of religious teachers. All honour, therefore, (so far), to them and the Elder Brother.

We come now to where the shoe pinches. For it is equally needful to see where the Elder Brother and the Pharisees failed. Up to this point in the parable, the father had no word of blame or reproof for the elder son. The man had lived a winsome life, and his record of service was a glory. His father, in the words of the parable, openly thanked him for this, and assured him that all that he had was his.

But on the day when the young wanderer stole home, sick and sorry for himself, limping like a whipped dog—(by the way, I wonder how much of his repentance and ours is due to an empty stomach?)—this good brother betrayed a new phase of his soul. He had been good, but with a narrow goodness. He had been just, but with a stern justice. He had been pious, but with a chilly piety. And now, when the big test comes, he shows the defect of his hard quality.

It is now that the contrast between the two brothers passes into the contrast between the brother and the father. It is a contrast of *welcomes,* a contrast between a big heart and a little heart, a broad goodness and a narrow goodness.

On the one hand, we see the smile of the father, a smile that lights up the whole parable, as it lit up his face, like a burst of sunshine. That smile is the biggest thing in the whole Gospel of God. Indeed, it *is* the Gospel of God. The father's welcome and the father's immediate and unconditioned forgiveness are the hope of this sinning world. This is, indeed, the very heart of God revealed. Forgotten is the sin; forgotten is the shame; forgotten is the long wandering. There is only a picture of open arms, a winning smile, a dim, glad moisture in the eyes, and a wide-flung door. This is God the Father. Nothing is so much like God the Father as this—that smile and that wide-flung door! . . . But because it is so essentially God, it is the bit in God we shall never fathom!

Now, it is here that the best human goodness fails, and with it the Elder Brother. He came home ("*in the field,*" remember, doing the father's work) and behaved like a petted and spoiled house-dog, yapping at a strange cur. That is more than a mere simile. He was a favoured house-dog and the Prodigal was a strayed cur. But we are souls, not dogs.

X

Where did the Elder Brother fail, and where did the Pharisees fail?

The first fault I find in this son is that he had never really been sorry, brokenly sorry, for the young brother's tragedy. He had called him hard names, (every one of which he had fully deserved), but there had been no longing, no yearning, no pity, and no ceaseless prayer for the welfare of that derelict. In fact, when sitting by the fire of a winter's night, he had been restive when he heard his father heave a sagging sigh, knowing where the old man's heart was straying. But he had only cursed the young fool for the ruin he had wrought, and hoped, for the sake of everybody, that he was decently dead.

The second fault lay in his ungenerous pique that the father had so immediately and unreservedly restored the wandering son to his home, his heart, and his pardon. Should there not have been some just probation? Was this open sinner to be allowed to squander his father's estate in riotous excess, and then when his pockets were empty, and he was down and out, come whining home, with nothing said and nothing done? This was too much. He himself had served his father, year in and year out, manfully repressing all desire to break bounds. And now this scamp, with the taint of his uncleanness still flavouring him, came stealing home, back to love and favour, as if nothing had happened. Yes, it was too much. So he shut his heart and would not go in.

A third fault lay in his attitude of mind. He had been too quick to believe the worst about his erring brother. He had jumped at once to the lowest interpretation both of the Prodigal's sin and of his motives in returning. On the one hand, he suggested that his brother's folly had taken the most abandoned form of all types of fleshly sin ("devoured thy living with harlots"); and on the other hand, he insinuated that only need and hunger had driven the lad home. All this, no doubt, may have been more than true. But truth may seem very cruel on bitter lips!

The fourth fault is—a face without a smile. Instead, he offered a face with a frown. His sin is one of ominous omission. He is judged not so much by what he was as by what he failed to be. There was no true gladness in his heart that a sinner, from whatever motives, had forsaken his foolish ways, and crawled back to the father's house.

There is no doubt that in his own life he was a good man. But he was not good enough!

XI

Can we suggest anything more true of the Pharisees than this? They were good people, the flower of their day. They loved and served God, none more. They were truly zealous of His honour, in love and loyalty. It would be ungenerous and untrue to deny their goodness, their zeal, or their passion. Not until Christ brought His perfect light had any other people so loved and adored God as this body of his servants, and no one was more zealous for His moral law. But when Jesus came and consorted with the sinners and the fallen, with the publicans and harlots and outcasts, when He threw open the door of the Father's kingdom to these strayed souls, the Pharisees, like the Elder Brother, sulked in puzzled anger. These fallen people should not be received with a smile, but with correction. They had broken the holy law and departed from the moral commandments! Thus the Pharisees too, like the Elder Brother, would not go in. They refused to sit down with the prodigal at the feast of God's joy.

This is their sin. They were good, but not good enough. They had to learn, as we all have to learn, that the mercy of God is a thing to gasp at. We can never measure it or exhaust it, but only accept it with broken praise. It is incomprehensible, like space.

XII

I trust it is clear that this Elder Brother was no hypocrite, in any true sense of that term, professing a good creed he did not practise. Rather was he *too loyal* to the narrow creed he professed, in which he had been bred! He was not a self-righteous prig. He was not a prim bigot who denied goodness or refused pardon to others. Moreover, his own personal life, as we know, was beyond all cavil, and his loyalty to his inherited beliefs was painfully exact. We criticise him not so much for what he was as for the creed that made him what he was! For the real tragedy of the Elder Brother was *the view of God the Father* by which he lived. It was not that he was untrue but too true to this creed. His fault, indeed, is one common to many good people, that in their eagerness to uphold God's righteousness, they forget God's mercy. They demand probation and discipline from the outcasts, lest there be any appearance of condoning sin. They do not welcome the return of the prodigal until he has shown that his reformation is sincere. They want proof that his heart is changed.

In judging the Elder Brother we should remember some important things. (1) We are comparing man with God when we compare the son with the father. (2) His failure is one common to all forms of human goodness, and is in no way typical of him alone. (3) His severity comes from his honourable passion for the broken laws of God. (4) His own life is a romance of loyalty and devotion. (5) The light by which we judge him and the Pharisees would never have been ours had Jesus not lived and died.

The Elder Brother *after* Jesus (which many of us are!) is a different thing from the Elder Brother *before* Jesus. The Pharisee before Jesus is only a praise and a glory, for he loved God in a sinful world and hated evil with a pure heart. It is the Pharisee *after* Jesus who is intolerable!

A VINDICATION OF PONTIUS PILATE

In a strictly legal sense, there is only one person responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus—Pontius Pilate, the Procurator of Judea. Without his consent and decree, our Lord's death could not have taken place.

Why this final responsibility actually rests with Pilate is a matter of history.

With their usual political genius, the Romans had granted the conquered Jews a generous latitude of self-government. Their Sanhedrin, equivalent in our common speech to a "local parliament," retained a considerable range of power. Indeed, the only great prerogative withheld from them in dealing with their own people was the "death sentence," which was jealously preserved in the hands of the Roman Procurator. It is recorded, for instance, that the famous Annas, the High Priest, had been "broken" and deposed because he had once trespassed against this guarded right.

In view of this, it is beyond question that Pilate, and Pilate alone, sentenced Jesus to death. The official document, required by Roman law, was undoubtedly signed by him as Governor. Ideally, also, it does not matter whether he did this willingly or unwillingly, freely or because badgered and bullied. As soon as he put his quill to that famous scrap of paper—no matter what his motives, reasons, or excuses may have been—he became personally responsible to the judging world for his prisoner's condemnation.

I

In later days, this was the one fact that Christians remembered regarding Pilate. With a clearness of mind that saw ultimate things, they saw this. They argued, unanswerably, that had he been honest, fearless, or loyal, their Lord would not have been crucified.

Hence, for centuries, Pilate's memory was a scorn. Every new generation of shocked Christians, remembering their dear Lord, called his judge by dreadful names—murderer, assassin, coward—a man without heart or conscience, who sported with justice and gravely misused a matchless opportunity. They accused him also of levity and brutal sarcasm, and especially of being frivolous and jocose at his victim's expense. Although they knew the prime guilt of the priests, yet at times Pilate seemed to them the "villain of the piece," a heartless and irresolute man whose indifference amounted to a crime, and whose jocular irreverences hurt their souls like the cut of a whip.

This early hate and scorn are seen most clearly in the absurd inventions of later centuries regarding his end. Stories passed from mouth to mouth of how he met a miserable and tragic death. Some alleged that he committed suicide, others that he was beheaded. There were fabulous tales of how his dead body was treated. One account informs us that it was pitched into the Tiber, where, even though weighted with lead, it would not sink! Another, from a foolish analogy of names, asserts that it was thrown into a small lake near Mount Pilatus in Switzerland, where every year, on the anniversary of the trial, it reappears on the surface and washes its guilty hands in useless regret.

All this seems to us like flogging a dead horse. We can understand, only too easily, the righteous resentment from which such spurious tales arose. These horrified Christians could not bear to think that this man who had so lightly sent the blameless Lord to his cross, had entirely escaped some fitting retribution for his enormity. As a kind of "poetic justice," therefore, they welcomed every gossipy tale that enlarged on his fate. That these stories are inventions, we need not doubt. What makes them the more ludicrous, as by contrast, is the solitary tradition of the Coptic Church that Pilate in later life became a Christian, and afterwards died a saint and martyr. The least we can say of these childish stories is that they cannot all be true!

Regarding Pilate's end, (if I may digress for a moment), the only artistic or psychological speculation regarding his future, known to me, is Anatole France's inimitable sketch, where the Procurator is discovered living in after days as a stout old invalid, wheeled about in a "bath-chair" at Baiæ, the Roman watering-place. When questioned by a former comrade about the old days in Judea and especially about Jesus, Pilate had forgotten the whole incident! Had he been merely a heartless and frivolous being, as his early detractors asserted, this is the most likely and most fitting end to his career. "Jesus?" he murmured, "Jesus—of Nazareth? I cannot call him to mind."

Needless to say, we know nothing of Pilate's end. It is the genius of the Bible that it is never merely "curious" about people. So far as it is concerned, when Pilate dismissed Jesus to his cross, he himself stepped completely out of its ken. This is the Bible's glorious economy—that it has no further interest even in a Roman Governor once he has played his ominous rôle.

II

Thus Pilate was fiercely scorned by the loyal Christians of earlier days. There was nothing too terrible to say or too bitter to invent against this man whose careless gesture sent Jesus to his cross.

But time brings knowledge, and sometimes wisdom. Modern ideas of Pilate's responsibility for Christ's death and of his legal attitude throughout the trial have changed considerably. For one thing, people have given a more impartial study to the records of the case and have seen the series of events in a better perspective. Moreover, they have made a sympathetic attempt to appreciate Pilate's difficulties, and have seen how desperately he was cornered by Christ's aggressive enemies. And finally, from the narratives themselves, they have given him some deferred credit not only for justice, but also for his honest and even resolute endeavours to set Jesus free.

There is one notable and rather startling exception to this gentler outlook on Pilate. In his recent *Life of Jesus,* Dr Klausner, of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem, asserts that the priests, in strict conformity with their usual custom, handed Jesus over to the Governor after a full proof of the charges, and took no further part in the course of the trial. In consequence, Jesus was questioned, tried, and sentenced solely by Pilate, who was known to hate and despise all Jews, and was especially fierce against any insurrectionist or anyone who "moved" the people. He tried Jesus in his own court, from which the Jews were excluded for fear of contamination at the Passover. Having questioned his prisoner about charges of Kingship and Messiahship, which Jesus fully admitted though he qualified them as *spiritual,* his judge condemned him forthwith on the ground of "treason," as a turbulent and dangerous fellow who made obscure claims to some sort of kingship.

According to Dr Klausner, the only guile of the priests lay in preferring this faked accusation of temporal kingship against Jesus. The rest lay with Pilate. In formulating their charges, they were cunningly banking on his fierce hatred of any form of insurrection, and on the knowledge that the very mention of tumult was to him like a red rag to a bull! It was Pilate, therefore—Pilate alone—who examined, tried and condemned Jesus. He cared little or nothing for human life, and his only concern was to keep his province quiet and avoid trouble. Known to be fierce and brutal, he had no respect for ideal justice. Why, he had actually slaughtered Jews by the hundred on a more flimsy pretext than this! Hence, when the priests themselves at their own instance handed a Jew over to him on a substantiated charge of "kingly" claims, to which the prisoner himself pleaded guilty, he dealt with the case out of hand, without any scruple of miscarriage of justice.

So far, of course, the records are against Dr Klausner. But he clears away this difficulty by accusing the early Christians of doctoring the records! The reason he gives for his views is speciously clever but as speciously false. He asserts that our accounts of the trial are coloured by an attempt to let the Roman people down gently! The early Christians had no wish to antagonise the Empire in which they had to live. It would have been extremely impolitic, therefore, to draw a picture of a Roman Governor who had been an instrument for a miscarriage of justice. Such a picture would have prejudiced the Roman mind against the young Church, and might have aroused hatred and persecution. Hence, according to Dr Klausner, the writers of our narratives deliberately but unjustly laid the chief blame upon the despised Jews, who were there for anybody to kick, and gave a more or less favourable estimate of Pilate, showing him as desperately cornered by passionate enemies, and yet honestly trying to let his prisoner off. But in reality, the whole blame and the full responsibility rested with this brutal and vicious Governor!

It is evident that Dr Klausner suffers from as much bias as he so lightly attributes to the early Christians. A Jew himself, he is anxious to lift the ancient burden of blame from the shoulders of his own people. Naturally, the only effective way of doing this is to find some other shoulders on which to lay it—and the shoulders of Pilate are convenient! But Dr Klausner forgets two things among others. He forgets that his argument denies the authenticity of the records on which he founds his own case and from which we have any knowledge of the facts of the trial. Still more, he forgets the most impressive fact of all, that the account of the trial comes to us from *Jewish sources,* from the Apostles and Disciples, who were Jews themselves. The New Testament is not a Roman account of the proceedings but a Jewish!

Thus unless we are ready to question the entire record of the case as we have it in our narratives, we must dismiss this latest attempt to incriminate Pilate.

III

If we judge him, then, by the authentic records, what may we say of the Governor's conduct of this trial?

At the outset, since he was a Roman, it is our duty to measure him against the recognised standards of Roman justice, and against these only. According to these standards, therefore, as known to us in the laws, statutes, and edicts bequeathed to the world by the Roman people, how does Pilate stand?

I claim that every one who studies this trial without bias must admit that Pilate's procedure, measured even against the best traditions of Roman justice, appears both normal and fair.

At the outset, imagining that the case was one within their proper jurisdiction, (for they called Jesus simply a malefactor or evil-doer), he ordered the priests to take the prisoner and try him by their own laws. This was fair, and strictly in line with Rome's generous policy. The Governor was unwilling to snatch any right out of the hands of the Sanhedrin.

Only when the prosecution claimed the death sentence, which was solely within his own province, did Pilate consent to take the case in hand. Here again, judged by normal procedure, he followed the best traditions of Roman jurisprudence. He made certain in the first place that the priests, according to custom, had tried the prisoner in due form in their own court, had heard witnesses, formulated their charges, and were now presenting a considered accusation, supported by the official prosecutors duly required by Roman law. This again was entirely as it should be.

With this assured, Pilate now called for the charge and the evidence. At the moment, he was thrust into a difficulty peculiar to the special occasion. This being the eve of the Passover, the Jews refused to enter the Roman judgment hall for fear of pollution before the Feast. In this difficulty, Pilate courteously agreed to come out to them in the open air. There he heard the charges and questioned the witnesses. The charges may be summarised thus: "We found this fellow (1) perverting the nation; (2) forbidding to give tribute or taxes to Cæsar; and (3) saying that he himself is Christ, a King."

At this point, in order to be fair to the prisoner, since that noisy mob prevented any decent court decorum, he took the accused into the Prætorium and examined him closely regarding the accusations brought against him. He asked him pointedly if indeed he claimed to be a king, as the prosecution averred? Jesus admitted the truth of the charge: in effect, he pleaded guilty! But he added explanations to show *in what sense* he claimed to be a king —not a king on this earth holding worldly dominion, but a spiritual king with spiritual sovereignty. It is fair to say that this was a verbal disclaimer which Pilate, as a typical Roman, could not easily appreciate. His difficulty in grasping the idea of a "spiritual kingship" was not so much personal as national.

Thus far, we must admit two facts. First, Jesus did not, and could not, deny the charge of kingship. This claim of Messiahship represented the core of his message, the Kingdom of God. He *was* a king, and therefore he admitted the accusation in qualified terms. If he had denied it, he might easily have been discharged. In the special circumstances, we may well believe that his denial would have ended the matter with Pilate. But in disclaiming kingship, Jesus would have been untrue to God and himself. So let us remember that to all intents and purposes, *he pleaded guilty!* This fact is one of the most important in any fair estimate of Pilate's subsequent conduct.

That the prisoner pleaded guilty does not suggest for a moment that the judge was bound to condemn. Far from it! Nonetheless, the fact that Jesus openly admitted the charge of kingship and therefore called no witnesses in his own defence, should be constantly remembered in any fair consideration of Pilate's conduct and verdict.

The second fact we must admit is the extreme difficulty in which this calm admission of our Lord placed Pilate from the point of view of Roman law. So jealous was Tiberius of his own rights, that he had proclaimed by an imperial edict that anyone within the Empire who claimed kingship (that is, anyone not voted insane or unbalanced), and anyone who claimed divine honours to rival with Cæsar's, should be adjudged guilty of *treason:* and the only punishment for treason was *death.* This was the law by which Pilate must proceed. It is not a question whether this law was just or good. Pilate's whole duty was to *administer* this law, as Roman Judge and Governor.

Here then, the Procurator had his first difficulty —a prisoner previously judged guilty and now formally accused by the responsible Sanhedrin of treasonable claims as a king, who yet calmly and openly admitted that he was a king! Although the accused qualified his claim as spiritual, his own unsupported word was the only evidence of that, for Jesus called no witnesses in his own defence. At this moment, by Roman law, Pilate would have been fully justified in condemning Jesus, and no one could have called him in question on any point of legality. But in his extended private examination, he was shrewd enough, just enough, and sympathetic enough to see the real absurdity of the accusation. He recognised easily that Christ's claim to kingship (mark you, never disavowed!) had no political implication, and no challenge to temporal authority. He guessed also, from his previous knowledge of the priests, the *motives* at the back of the prosecution. As the Bible puts it, he suspected that "for envy" they had delivered him up.

IV

At this stage of the trial, an interesting question suggests itself to our minds.

Having learned in this private examination that the prisoner's claim of kingship had no imperial or political significance, and having guessed that this man was only one of these "vague philosophers" and "seekers after truth," with whom he was so familiar in Rome, could Pilate (and should Pilate) have dismissed the case at once on the ground that there was no criminal capital indictable offence involved? Was it indeed an indictable offence in Roman law to claim such "other-worldly" kingship as Jesus claimed? Even if we grant that the edict of Tiberius apparently denounced *all assertions of kingship* within the Empire as treason, could Christ's claim possibly come within the sweep of that edict?

In Pilate's favour the following facts should be noted:—

1. As we have mentioned, the prisoner's qualification of his kingship as "spiritual" was wholly unsupported! Indeed, on the other side, there were definite witnesses who asserted on oath that he *did* set himself up as against Cæsar. (The priests obliquely supported this evidence by their cry, "*We have no King but Cæsar.*") We know, of course, that these witnesses were suborned and their evidence false. *But did Pilate?* Failing proof of their deceit, was he not forced as a Judge to accept their testimony as credible evidence of Christ's temporal claims?

This consideration reflects on the contention of some of my legal friends that it was open to Pilate to dismiss the case on the ground of "insufficient proof." But was the proof really insufficient? There are two things not to be overlooked at this point. First of all, the case came before the Procurator from an official diet of the Sanhedrin, who had unanimously voted Jesus guilty of death. That in itself was almost equal to the judgment of a "lower court." Secondly, the witnesses for the prosecution gave definite circumstantial evidence that Jesus had claimed this temporal power. They lied, of course, but Pilate could not possibly know this. *If their statements were accepted as true, the evidence for* *conviction was complete and sufficient in the eyes of the law.*

It should be remembered also that Pilate's two statements, that he found no "crime" or fault in Jesus, and that he believed him "innocent," were based not on evidence taken in the open court, but as a result of his private examination. In other words, his statements represent purely personal judgments. But a judge is not expected to give a personal judgment, but only *a verdict according to evidence*! It needs no special legal knowledge on our part to assure us that the results of Pilate's private interview could not competently or relevantly be set against evidence attested in the open court. Like every other soul who had dealings with Jesus, Pilate was deeply impressed by him, and sincerely believed that he made no temporal claims. But this private conviction could not be set against the evidence publicly adduced before him that this prisoner had made definite claims to the temporal kingship of the Jewish nation. If the major charge of treason were pressed, this definite evidence was the one fact in law on which Pilate had to base his verdict.

2. There is no doubt that under the edict of Tiberius a claim of kingship, *of any sort,* was an indictable capital offence! The Emperor claimed not only unquestioned Imperial sway, but also *divine worship as a God.* It cannot be doubted, therefore, that even Christ's claim of spiritual kingship would have been ruled as wholly within the scope of the edict. As we know, in later days, Christians were put to death for refusing these divine honours to Cæsar.

Moreover, just about this time (*i.e.*, round the early "thirties" A.D.), Tiberius seems to have lost all reason and perspective regarding *majestas* or "high treason." If we can credit the horrors of the sixth book of Tacitus, the last few years of the Emperor's reign were stark terror. No fewer than from eighty to one hundred people, often on the most flimsy grounds, were put to death "for pretension to power." This law of *majestas* was most strictly and cruelly applied in every part of the Roman Empire. It is beyond any doubt, therefore, that if our Lord's claim of kingship had been tried in Rome, no matter how spiritual it was asserted to be, it would have been ruled as a *capital indictable offence*! Hundreds of other people had been tried and condemned for less.

3. Before he could rule that Christ's claim of kingship was "outwith the edict" and therefore not an indictable offence, Pilate had to consider another very relevant question—whether this spiritual claim might not have definite *political reactions* on the peace and stability of the province! A kingship might be "spiritual" and yet have disturbing political results on the safety of the colony whose peace Pilate had to protect.

With the facts then as they are, and especially in view of this wholesale edict of Tiberius, Pilate could not be expected to take the prisoner's unsupported disclaimer as justifying him in ruling the case as "outwith the edict," and therefore not involving a capital indictable offence. To expect that he should have done so, in some noble moment of judicial heroism, is the worst of all historical blunders, for it is a foolish attempt to judge him not by the law and practice of his own day or by the strictness of the edict of Tiberius he was pledged to administer, but by the enlightened interpretations of modern thought.

While it is true, therefore, that Pilate saw something of what was in Christ's mind, and while this no doubt affected his view of the case, how could he honestly evade the real legal issue—a man of sound mind arraigned on a charge of treasonable kingship, who openly asserted that in certain definite ways he was a King? Feeling somehow that the charge was faked, and suspecting that the prisoner was admitting it in a sense wholly different from the accusation, he made his first honest attempt to have Jesus released, in spite of his own admission and the edict of Tiberius.

This attempt was extremely clever, though from the legal angle it was a subterfuge. He came out to the expectant priests and formally addressed them. He could not give (even if he had wished to give) the only possible verdict of acquittal in Roman law, "*This man is not guilty*": for the prisoner himself, before witnesses and in the open court, had reasserted his claims. If Pilate had dismissed him as "not guilty," and any real turbulence had arisen afterwards from his claims of kingship, the Governor would have been in a cleft stick. For the Jews would have said, and said rightly, "We charged this man before you with kingship, a treasonable claim: the man himself admitted the charge: and yet you acquitted the prisoner." Had any future tumult arisen and Pilate been called to Rome to face the usual investigation, he would certainly have been punished for evasion of law, according to the Roman statutes he was pledged to support. This difficulty of Pilate is as clear to me as daylight.

So he did all that a fair judge could do with such an awkward prisoner, who admitted the truth of the accusation. He did not say, indeed he could not say, "This man is not guilty." He tried, however, to disguise the issue and deceive the accusers by saying honestly, *"I find no fault or crime in him."* It was a really clever and, I think, honest attempt to foil the priests and "sidestep" them from their purpose. But in strict law it was an *opinion*, not a verdict.

V

Though this was in no sense a legal acquittal, yet it might have passed as such, and been accepted as such, from the lips of any other Roman governor and by any other people than the Jews. Many hearers might have been deceived into thinking that this was final: and no doubt Pilate announced it in the obvious belief that it would be accepted as final! But the priests, like dogs on the scent, were quick enough to see that this was in no sense a legal verdict such as they were entitled to demand. The only possible verdict in Roman law was "guilty" or "not guilty," whereas this was only an adroit compromise. Meanwhile, they knew that *with Christ's open admission of kingship*, Pilate could not possibly give a full acquittal! At the best, all he could say was that he considered the man's claim innocuous. Had he said so, and in terms thereof dismissed the case, let us remember two things—first, he would have run counter to the letter of the imperial edict; and second, he should have had to assume full personal responsibility for any future trouble that might have arisen among the excited people from Christ's Messianic claims. And already he must have received a detailed report of the feverish disturbance caused a few days before by this man's dramatic entry into Jerusalem.

Hence, knowing Pilate's dilemma, the priests pressed strenuously for a strictly legal pronouncement. What encouraged them most and made their persistence so bitter, was a certain knowledge they had of Pilate's past. To understand the future course of the trial, we must turn back for a moment to some interesting history.

Two incidents chosen from Pilate's past administration will serve to explain the priest's persistence.

The Governor's predecessors in office had generously respected the Jewish desire that all Roman soldiers, when entering Jerusalem, should not carry their standards and ensigns, decorated with the Emperor's effigy. But some years ago, Pilate in a thoughtless and haughty way gave orders that the legions should carry their standards and plant them on the citadel. At once there was a fierce revolt of the citizens, who besought the Procurator to remove the hated standards. He scornfully refused. For days the people besieged his palace, imploring him on their knees to relent. Still he refused, trying even to intimidate them. But they remained like leeches. At last Pilate gave in and removed the ensigns.

That is the first incident. It taught the priests that if they only brought enough pressure to bear on Pilate, they could bend him to their will. In character he was more obstinate than strong; and, like all obstinate men, he could be pushed by persistence into compliance. Having once forced him to climb down, the priests imagined that they had taken his measure.

The second incident is even more important for an understanding of the future course of the trial.

Some time before this, Pilate had procured shields, religiously dedicated and engraved with the Emperor's name, and had hung them up in the Palace of Jerusalem. This again roused the people for the honour of their sacred city. They sent a large deputation of priests and nobles to ask the Governor to remove these detested religious emblems from Jerusalem. But Pilate, having been once stung, wished to make up for his past weakness and defeat, and on this occasion he obstinately refused. In spite of all pleas, he stuck dourly to his small point. But the priests, not to be outdone, executed a crafty flank movement. They dispatched a secret embassy straight to Rome and laid their grievance before the Emperor himself. In the end, a letter came back from Tiberius, publicly rebuking Pilate and commanding him to remove the offensive shields.

This was the second lesson the priests had learned, a lesson that stood them in good stead in the trial of Jesus—that they could force their ruler's hand by appealing to Cæsar, knowing also that if they made another complaint, the Governor might even be recalled.

VI

From these incidents, we believe, the priests had learned two lessons which influenced their conduct throughout the course of the trial: first, that persistency could break mere obstinacy; and second, that veiled threats of appeal to Rome might work the oracle.

With this in their minds, then, they refused to accept as a legal verdict Pilate's non-committal phrase, "I find no crime in him." They felt that on the facts of the case they had him in a dilemma—either to force him to pronounce "not guilty" (a verdict that Pilate legally dare not give in view of the prisoner's admission), or to compel him to the natural legal outcome of the situation.

It was from now onwards that Pilate, evidently deeply perplexed, tried his famous devices to meet the amazing situation. By Christ's open and continued claim of kingship, he was precluded from the one legal verdict he would plainly have liked to give. How then could he turn the corner, for he was obviously impressed by Jesus and believed him materially innocent?

It is this desire in his heart that explains what we so often and so foolishly call his "weak devices." I think we should observe that right to the unhappy end he made some honest attempts to have Jesus discharged, in spite of a legal impasse. All of these devices, which we commonly call "shameful," were really creditable to his heart and distinctly honourable. He could not acquit the accused, (you cannot acquit a prisoner who pleads guilty!), but *could he release him?* That was now his sole problem.

Let us look at these honourable expedients. We may take the first as that which we have just discussed—that cleverly non-committal sentence which he hoped might have met the situation and turned the people and priests from their designs. That failed.

His second expedient was naturally suggested by the chance mention of Galilee of which Jesus was a citizen. Herod, the ruler of that province, happened to be in the city for the observance of the Feast. Pilate at once jumped to the notion of sending Jesus to Herod to have his opinion of the case. This was quite natural; for though at present under his jurisdiction, Jesus was also a subject of Herod. It is quite ridiculous to say, as so many do, that Pilate hoped by this move to rid himself of the burden of decision! Whatever Pilate was, he was not a fool; and he knew that Herod, who was only a chance guest in Jerusalem, had no jurisdiction whatever in a case like this. Herod could only have tried Jesus, had the case been moved to Galilee; and that meanwhile was impossible. There is no doubt that Pilate's idea was to have Herod's opinion (which he expected to be favourable, for Herod posed as a broad-minded "Greek"), and thus have his own hands strengthened in dealing with the priests. But Herod, "that fox," as Jesus once called him, was much too wily to involve himself in a knotty concern like this. After some cheap amusement at the prisoner's expense, he threw him back on Pilate, with the suggestion that the man was only a harmless fanatic! Herod's "wit" did not help Pilate. Thus his second device failed, and the case was exactly as it had been before.

VII

From mistaken ideas, Pilate's third device is sometimes voted the most scandalous of all. If rightly understood, however, it is as honourable as any. As the priests still clamoured for a verdict on the major charge, which Pilate was distinctly unwilling to give, he suggested to them that they should depart from this and be content with conviction on one of the minor issues. If they would consent to this, he would scourge the prisoner as being guilty on these minor charges, and then release him. This suggestion of the Governor must not be misunderstood, though I fear it commonly is. It does not mean that Pilate was willing to scourge Jesus, instead of crucifying him, on the charge of being a king, or that he was ready to scourge him whether innocent or not. That would not have been Roman law, for on the one hand, the only punishment for claiming kingship was death; and on the other hand, no Roman judge could scourge without a conviction. The meaning of Pilate's suggestion quite obviously is this—if you depart from the major charge, the penalty of which is death, I shall then convict him on the other issues ("perverting the nation," etc.), for which I shall order the appropriate punishment of the lash. This was quite an honourable suggestion, a plea to the pursuers to drop the one serious charge in favour of the others. But the priests would have none of it. Thinking rather that by the suggestion the Procurator was weakening, they redoubled their insistence on the deeper charge of *treason*. Thus Pilate's kindly overture was baulked.

But the Roman, in his honest desire for Christ's release, was not yet done. His next expedient was a brave bid to the people's latent sense of justice. If the people took up Christ's case, the affair was settled, for the priests would not dare to stand against their protest. If they clamoured for the prisoner's release, the whole prosecution would automatically drop. For this end, Pilate made use of a sort of "King's pardon" sometimes exercised at this season of goodwill. There was a man in prison awaiting death, a noted robber and murderer, called Barabbas. Certain interesting traditions say that his full name was Jesus Barabbas. Pilate had this man sent for. Then with a fine and unexpected touch of psychological genius, he placed the two prisoners side by side. There was real strategy in this attempt to win a popular vote that might demand Christ's release and thus compel the priests to resile from their charge; for who could help seeing the beauty and purity of Jesus compared with the brutal face of that murderous robber? "Shall I release unto you," he cried, pointing to them in turn, "*Jesus called Barabbas* or *Jesus called Christ*?" I have no doubt what the common decency of that crowd would have decided but for the whispered suggestions of the priests. Primed and instigated by their own leaders, they clamoured in a mad slogan for Barabbas—a decision that must have amazed this patrician Roman! Thus Pilate's clever appeal to a mob's decency was defeated.

By this time, (influenced, as one record says, by the pleading of his wife), Pilate felt desperate. He was convinced in his heart that Jesus was substantially innocent, though technically guilty. The mental distress of Pilate's situation can only be adequately understood by an honest judge whose "heart" is routed by the law he must administer. As the accusers clung relentlessly to the major charge, which the prisoner had not denied, and demanded the penalty for this offence applicable by Roman law, the outcome now seemed obvious. Indeed, unless Pilate was willing to shoulder the personal risk of dismissing Jesus, with all its possible consequences, (and that against a nation's desire and a nation's evidence), he was bound to enforce the strict law. Can we blame him in the circumstances if he shirked the responsibility of "discharging" a prisoner whom he could not acquit?

If we think of it quietly, apart from our modern Christian sentiments, we must admit that this was an amazing case. The accusation was clear, with definite witnesses; the prisoner did not specifically deny the accusation and called no witnesses for the defence; and the natural legal penalty of the prisoner's admission was death. How could Pilate honourably evade this? Let us remember that he only knew Jesus as a strange, interesting and impressive Jew, who had a distinct following and an unsettling influence over the people. That power with a Jewish crowd, full of smouldering nationalism, *might* be a source of real danger! It is only fair that we should try to regard the whole trial apart from our legacy of Christian love and horror. We know Jesus as the Christ: Pilate knew him only as a prisoner accused by his own countrymen on definite charges of treason, a prisoner who gloried in the accusation, a prisoner, too, whose power with the mob was a unique thing.

He had one of two courses open to him. Since a verdict of "acquittal" was foreclosed to him, (the prisoner admitting the charge!), he had either *to pass judgment on Jesus* with the penalty of death as demanded by Roman law, or he must take the full risk and onus on himself of *discharging the prisoner*, on the ground that his claims of Messiahship had no bearing on Roman authority. In all honesty I assert that had he done the latter, he would have taken a personal responsibility in that situation that few other men, then or now, would have braved! On the one hand, he would have antagonised the whole Jewish Government, and on the other hand, should Christ's claims have led to any subsequent tumult, he would have jeopardised not only his own future but also, and worse, the safety of the colony. I think in fairness that we ought to see what an extraordinary sacrifice Pilate would have made, had he discharged Jesus, this unknown Jew, accused by his own nation, and pleading guilty to the charge.

Hence, when the priests brought their final guns to bear, with that veiled threat of appeal to Rome, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend," Pilate at last gave up his most unequal contest against the Jews and Roman law, and "consented to his death."

It is unfair to say that he weakly gave in, "for his skin's sake," as it were, because of this veiled threat of appeal to Rome. He gave the legal penalty of death because he knew as a trained judge that if the Jews appealed to Rome, (as they might easily do, judging from past experience), he had not a case either for acquittal or discharge on the evidence produced. The oblique appeal to Rome only convinced him that the priests had their hearts set like a flint on a legal verdict.

To me it is the most beautiful irony in all human history to see a Roman Judge of Pilate's quality struggling so valiantly to save the life of a despised Jew, arraigned at the instance of his own people, and himself admitting the charge. I think that our usual picture of Pilate as weak, careless, indifferent, unjust, cowardly or irresolute is a caricature of the facts. In the end, he was beaten by the Roman law which he himself was pledged to administer.

VIII

Even yet, after his official consent, the Governor tried two devices to work upon the people's emotions. Jesus had been the hero of the crowd, and might be their hero yet! If the crowd by any strange chance were to clamour for the prisoner's release, Pilate might then easily stretch the strict interpretation of the law, or force the priests to withdraw the major charge.

The first of these expedients is usually regarded as a piece of dramatic play-acting, stamping Pilate as a *poseur*. But it may be better regarded in a much more honourable light. Knowing the Jews' traditional fear of having innocent blood on their heads, he called for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying: "Lo, I am innocent of the blood of this just man: see ye to it." I fancy, as he said this, that he leaned back in his chair and waited for a hush of superstitious awe and fear. Surely the people would recoil from the thought of having innocent blood on their heads! That washing of his hands was a dramatic expedient to stampede the people with superstitious fear. But who can reckon on an excited mob? This people who so lately called "Hosanna," shouted out: "His blood be on us, and on our children!" . . . *And it has been!*

The last device is commonly judged the most shameful of all. I wonder if it is not the most tender? Thinking to win by one last bid for sympathy what he had not won by persuasion and could not win by law, he brought forth the prisoner into the open, after he had been scourged. (Let us remember, by the way, that this scourging was not a piece of gratuitous cruelty. It was a recognised part of the official punishment for treason before crucifixion.) Pointing to the pathetic figure that the priests had accused of being a king, he said: "Behold I bring him forth to you that you may know that I find no fault in him. *Behold the man.*" It was a last plea to the mob that once loved him. It was an appeal to their sympathy and human tenderness. Could they resist this pathetic sight? But the people cried: "Crucify him!"

That was finis.

IX

The one thing in Pilate's official conduct that at first sight hurts a sensitive heart is the draping of that placard round Christ's neck, with the apparently ribald motto, "The King of the Jews." People wince at this as needless mockery, and even buffoonery. But what are the facts? In the first place, Roman law prescribed that each condemned man should bear a plain visible statement of the charge on which he suffered death. Christ's label is actually no more than what was both common and legal. The second fact is this—that Pilate, whether seriously or jocularly, stated no more and no less than the precise offence on which he had been forced to condemn Jesus. "The King of the Jews" was in truth the actual charge on which the priests had secured crucifixion. Finally, that placard was not so much mockery of Jesus as mockery of the Jews. The Governor was using the occasion to jeer at the nation he despised. It is a little thing, in a coarse age like that, to allow this Roman a gibe at the people who had forced him to a course he knew to be unjust, though technically legal.

What shall we think of Pilate in the prosecution of this trial?

There are two historic criticisms of the Procurator, which Christians have not sufficiently noticed. The first is the considered conclusion of Peter when addressing his own nation, "Whom ye delivered up and denied him in the presence of Pilate, *when he* *was determined to let him go.*" These few words are the final answer to Dr Klausner—a Jew laying the whole blame at the door of the Jews! The second is more important, for it is our Lord's verdict on Pilate's responsibility, "He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." I am glad to think that the whole attitude of the New Testament is based on this judgment of Jesus; for unlike later generations, the Apostles and Disciples had nothing bitter or rancorous to say of Pilate. They never regarded him as either *indifferent* or *unjust*. In their view, he only carried out a recognised law from the extreme penalty of which he himself was averse.

In general conclusion, we must admit that Pilate's conduct of the trial was not only normal and fair, as measured by Roman theory and practice, but even considerate and merciful. At any time in its course, he could have foreclosed it with a verdict of "guilty," and been unassailable on a question of law. With the major charge finally pressed and with the prisoner's qualified admission, Pilate was shut up on a point of law to the only possible verdict. We must even agree that on purely legal grounds, his decision was unimpeachable. For it must be remembered that it was on *a strict interpretation of Roman law* that Christ was crucified! The Governor himself was more than willing to waive this strict interpretation. Most people think that he might have taken the risk of "discharging" Jesus—indeed he *should* have discharged him, since he believed him to be just and innocent. But it is only fair to admit that so long as the priests pressed the major charge, he would have done so *on a technical breach of law,* for which he would have had to account had any trouble arisen. Thus if we see Pilate's position and consider his earnest and even ingenious attempts to free our Lord, in spite of his accusers, and even more so, in spite of the prisoner's admissions, we shall perhaps learn to see in Pilate not only an honest and fair judge, but even a man more kindly and merciful than the average of his own age.

Let us remember, above everything, that he was not judging Him whom we call Christ, but a man named Jesus, a Jewish citizen arraigned by his fellow-citizens, on points of law and order, attested by witnesses on oath. And he was not asked to say whether he thought Jesus good and adorable, but whether this prisoner, duly charged and witnessed against, was guilty on one precise charge, a claim of kingship, the official punishment for which was death. The guilt is not that Pilate condemned him on this charge, but that the priests preferred it.

It was not Pilate who crucified Jesus, but Roman law, treacherously used and pressed by the priests for their own ends.

IN PRAISE OF TWO SPLENDID COWARDS

On the fringe of the circle of light in which Jesus and his disciples move, there are two men who flit like ghosts amid the discreet shadows. Throughout our Lord's active ministry they haunt this dim shadow-land, vague, formless, and indistinct. We are aware of their presence; but we only see them as blurred figures, like people in a dark wood who slink behind the tree-trunks.

Only at the end of Christ's life do these two men slip out for a brief hour from their shelter into the full sunlight. But even then they are in the open day for so short a time that it is difficult for us either to see their forms or judge their characters. At the best, they give us only a quick snapshot, not a "sitting."

Both of these men, as we learn, were acquainted with Jesus. They met with him at different times and talked with him: as a result, they were deeply impressed by his teaching and personality. Being men of fine spiritual nature, longing for God's promised kingdom, they were especially attracted by our Lord's message for Israel. Many of their nation's vague longings for a Messiah seemed to be realised in this strange man from Galilee. Moreover, in their frequent meetings with him, we are assured that they learned to love and respect him. Indeed, in their secret hearts they acknowledged themselves his disciples. It is quite evident that they had talked deeply and seriously with him about spiritual things.

In spite of their interest and conviction, however, they lurked irresolutely among the shadows. They refused to take open part with him, or do anything publicly to aid him in his difficult work. Although they had power, influence, and high connections, which might have helped to smooth his path, they left him to face his controversies alone, against the combined attack of the classes which they themselves represented. Apparently, in spite of their intellectual interest in his teaching, neither of them was strong enough or resolved enough to step out from the discreet twilight in which they hid and walk with him in the daylight. We learn, for instance, that when they came to visit him they chose the kindly cover of darkness, and when they consulted him it was by stealth and in secret. Had they too much at stake to risk? Were they too much afraid? Or were they too uncertain in their minds to join openly with his followers? Whatever the reason for their inaction or indecision, our only picture of them is this blurred effect of shadows amid shadows.

I

What we know of these men can be briefly stated.

1. The first man, named Joseph, belonged to a place called Arimathæa. As wealth was reckoned in those days, he was a rich man. He was well educated, and was highly esteemed in his own social order. That he was a member of the Sanhedrin or Jewish Council speaks more fully than words can do for his great worth and place. In character, he is described as "a good man and righteous," who was

"looking for the Kingdom of God." Thus we may see in him one of the quiet spiritual forces that kept the religious life of their time pure and eager.

St Matthew informs us that he was a disciple of Jesus, and St John adds "but secretly for fear of the Jews." We read in St Luke's Gospel (xxiii. 51) that when the Sanhedrin met and condemned Jesus, Joseph did not consent to the judgment. By inference it is suggested (St Mark xiv. 64), that he deliberately absented himself from the meeting or refrained from recording his vote. Evidently, if he was unready to come out on Christ's side, he was equally unready to come out against him.

All the details of this picture hang together. They suggest a man deeply and sincerely interested in Christ and his message, and secretly acknowledging himself a disciple. But he is either too timid, too nervous of his position, or too unresolved in his mind to take sides for the Master he admires and believes. The difficulties, whether physical, social, or intellectual, are too strong for him. In consequence, up to the moment of Christ's death, he remains in the shadows, and allows our Lord to go to his cross without his open friendship or help.

2. The second man is Nicodemus. He appears only in St John's Gospel. As he resembles Joseph in many particulars, some critics have tried to identify him with Joseph of Arimathæa. But as St John mentions both Joseph and Nicodemus in the same incident, there is no ground for this belief. Any fancied resemblance between the two men may be only the natural resemblance of class, station, and education. Men resemble their class more than their own parents.

This man Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a Ruler of the Jews. He is also a member of the Sanhedrin. By implication, too, he is a man of means, power, and good standing. In St John's Gospel, we have a picturesque account of how he came to Jesus by night and spoke with him about the truth of his kingdom. That stealthy interview, under the shelter of darkness, reveals much of his character, with its earnestness, its academic perplexities, and its timidities. Evidently he, too, like Joseph, was eagerly awaiting the kingdom and searching for signs of its coming.

The various accounts suggest that he became a true disciple, but, like his friend, remained too timid or unconvinced to associate himself openly with our Lord. For instance, when the leaders summoned a hurried meeting in Jerusalem and resolved to arrest Jesus, Nicodemus very "cannily" remarked: "Doth our law judge a man, except it first hear from himself what he doeth?" This was a very guarded observation, where he cautiously sheltered himself behind a statement of principle. He did not speak one positive word in favour of Jesus. Even then, when some sharp-tongued member turned and asked him if he too was from Galilee, he took refuge in silence and let the matter drop immediately. He was willing to help Jesus, so long as he did not openly compromise himself! So he, too, like his friend Joseph, lurked in the discreet shadows, and kept a quite respectable distance from danger or controversy.

One may wonder if Jesus was hinting to him about his concealed loyalties, when he finished that conversation with him, in the third chapter of St John, by saying: "He that doeth the truth cometh to the *light*, that his works may be manifest, that they are wrought in God." But if so, Nicodemus was too undecided, too timid, or too bound to his own class and circle to risk taking any open part with Jesus.

II

These, then, are our two men in the shadows, as we have them portrayed in the early chapters of the Gospels. Before we speak of them further, there are three remarks that occur to me as worth making.

1. Some people assert, with a kind of half sneer, that Jesus only attracted to his ministry the poor, the lost, and the ignorant. (It is the same kind of sneer that is often applied to Christian work in heathen lands in our own day.) Now, there is no doubt that he *did* attract such broken and needy people, glory be to God: and there is no doubt that these people, in their deep misery, found all they needed of comfort and strength in the love and hope of his message. But it is quite wrong and quite foolish to speak of Jesus as if he did not, in that day and in our day, make a big appeal to the learned and the wealthy and the happy. We sometimes speak of the "unlettered fishermen" whom he attracted as his disciples. But these disciples were not "unlettered" in our sense of the term. To say that a man was "unlettered," in Christ's day, only meant that he did not belong to the academic order of the Pharisees and Priests; it certainly did not mean that he was *uneducated.* The sons of Zebedee, for instance, were of good social class and education. We know, for example, that John obtained entrance to the court-room because of his relationship to the High Priest. And here we have two men, leaders of

thought and men of mark, who were secretly believers in Christ's message. When we add dozens of others of the mental rank of Paul, Peter, Mark, and Luke, we shall see that the early Church started its mission with some of the best brains the world has known. In all ages, it is our Lord's glory that He does appeal to intellect. Indeed, where intellect is undeveloped, He stirs it and brings it to its fullest power. A man cannot be a Christian and not think.

2. While a secret discipleship may not be the highest and best form of Christian loyalty, it is a joy to remember that in all ages Jesus has had his bands of secret lovers and unknown friends. The kingdom of our Lord is always bigger than we imagine, and certainly bigger than any published statistics can ever make it! The influence of Jesus has been incalculable on individuals, society, institutions, and national laws and customs. The true Church cannot be counted by the head, as we do sheep. There are unnumbered thousands, outside the official membership of all the official churches, who are lovers of Jesus, as Joseph and Nicodemus were. We may regret that these people should stay outside the visible Church and thus rob it of their active help and support. The loss is twofold, their own and ours. (Unless perhaps the greatest loss be Christ's!) It would be an unguessable help if these secret lovers were to step out of the shadows and associate themselves openly with the Kingdom of God. But who are we to judge? In any case, it is a joy to remember the secret lovers.

3. The only person among us who is entitled to criticise these secret and vacillating disciples might

be an Indian or a modern Jewish youth who has had to take his stand for Jesus against the weight of caste, social disgrace, ostracism, trade loss, family embitterment, and religious hate. It is too easy for us to speak and judge! And our judgment from our arm-chair is so sweeping! To be a Christian in our land and day entails little hardship, wrench, social ban, or agony. Even were it true that Joseph and Nicodemus shunned a decision for Christ's kingdom because of the hardship it entailed, it is not for us to judge. I should listen reverently to a young Jewish convert in Mid-Europe speaking of these two discreet friends of Jesus; but even then, I should know that the Jewish convert would understand wistfully where I should only blunder.

III

We know what is commonly said of our two men as they lurk in the shadows. Blunt people, who have never had any agony of decision in their own spiritual life, call them cowards and poltroons. Resolute Christians, who have openly thrown everything on the scales and banked their fortunes on Jesus, speak with deep regret, if not contempt, of their vacillation and fear. Many people condemn them outright because they withheld their evidence for Jesus, when they, and they alone, had an opportunity to defend him in the Council. They were not only unreliable but *cowardly* friends. What a joy and comfort their friendship and backing would have been to Jesus in these last desperate days!

Personally, I think we must acquit them of many of the unworthy motives commonly attributed to them. The basest charge of all suggests that the motive for their inaction may be found either in fear for their own safety, loss of social prestige, or a shrinking from identifying themselves with a popular or "common" crowd. They were patricians who either feared the censure and outlawry of their own class, or could not overcome their own inherited prejudices. Therefore, while they admired and believed in Jesus, they stood timidly aside and allowed him to be condemned, unheard and unsupported. They knew, for instance—certainly Nicodemus knew—that Christ's claim of kingship was wholly spiritual and politically innocuous. Why did they not state their knowledge to the Sanhedrin? More so, why did they not offer evidence for their friend before Pilate? We may truly believe—see lecture on Pilate—that had the Governor received an independent and trustworthy testimony that Christ's claims of kingship had no political implications, he would have been so buttressed in his own views that he might have given a verdict of dismissal for Jesus. Their failure, therefore, it is said, was an indirect cause of Christ's condemnation. They were the only people known to us (outside the disciples who might have been accused of speaking from prejudice) who could have testified to the true teaching of Jesus. Their guilt, therefore, was not only that they deserted the man they respected and loved, and allowed him to go to his cross alone, but that they actually withheld the evidence they alone possessed that might have saved him from condemnation and crucifixion.

Now, while the thought of social ostracism and "the fear of the Jews" may have played a natural part in their conduct—and remember they *had* really a stupendous sacrifice to face—I am, nonetheless, convinced from the records that these lower fears were not the dominating motives of their conduct. What finally disproves mere cowardice or social prejudice as their ruling motive is that amazing act of theirs after our Lord's death. By that act they swept all charges of moral timidity and social prejudice aside as groundless: for they openly identified themselves with a discredited cause and a dishonoured man who had suffered the last Jewish indignity of crucifixion.

I am quite certain that the only possible charge against them—if it is a charge—is *intellectual irresolution*. They had talked with Jesus, but, to put it plainly, they were not convinced. We know how puzzled and tortured Nicodemus was in that reported conversation with the Master. Christ's ideas were so strange that he could not assimilate them. Both of them were seriously interested in the coming kingdom and deeply versed in the Scriptures. But although they were real seekers after truth, yet their minds were overlaid with all the foolish and biased expectations of the schools. Our Lord's views of the kingdom were so revolutionary, as compared with Jewish thought, that these two Pharisees groped in doubt and perplexity. Could this untutored Galilean teacher be right and all their learned professors wrong? It is very easy for us, with our knowledge of the Lord's teaching, to sneer at the obstinacy or dullness of a Pharisee or a Priest in Christ's day. But the more we think of a Pharisee's training and schooling, the more are we amazed that even one or two of them gave Jesus a fair hearing and some friendliness! There is little doubt that the fault of these two men, if it was a fault, was intellectual hesitancy, a most understandable intellectual doubt whether this man of Galilee could be the Messiah promised by the prophets.

Now, honest doubt is not a sin. It is easy for some people to believe, temperamentally and intellectually easy. But there are others, more passionate people, to whom the uprooting of beliefs that have been the life of their soul is a matter of agony. It needs almost a wind of God to tear them from their ancient anchorages. These two men, for instance, had been so deeply pledged to every good work for the Kingdom of God that for years they had deliberately centred all their dreams in the Jewish Church, as the only hope for that coming kingdom. And now they were called upon to give up all their trust in Jewish legalism and believe in a strange Messiah who not only broke their ancient system, but violated all the accredited teaching of their schools concerning what a Messiah should be. It is easy to gibe at these two patrician Pharisees who stood aside in the hour of Christ's need: but it would be more like the Jesus who understood their puzzlement and dealt with them so tenderly, if we too sought to understand the mental disturbance that threatened to shake them from the things they most surely believed.

IV

We pass now from the first phase, two men in the shadows, to the second phase, two men in the limelight.

In the strength of what they did in that fierce glare, I believe that all their past irresolution should be gloriously forgotten. If they are cowards, as many have wrongly called them, then the title of their closing chapter should be "*The Amazing Courage of Two Cowards.*"

By this time, Jesus is dead on his cross. To-morrow is the Passover. The bodies of the three crucified ones must be removed, lest they defile the holy day, for no felon may hang on his accursed cross through the Passover. Should there be no one to claim them, the bodies will be taken down by the soldiers, a hole will be roughly dug in some unsanctified corner, and they will be dropped, unhonoured and unsung, into a criminal's grave. That is all that the "crucified" can expect.

But a miracle took place in the hearts of the two Pharisees, a miracle of shock that swept their minds clear of all lingering dubieties. They had been unable to stand by Jesus in his lifetime, but the dramatic suddenness and unexpectedness of the disaster that had overwhelmed their friend so clarified the issues in their minds that these irresolute men became the first heroes of the new Church. The shadows at last became *real men* of flesh and blood, of passion and love.

The tale of their belated heroism is easily told, though sometimes it is as easily discounted. If rightly considered, however, their act is one of the idylls of Christian love.

We read that when Jesus died, Joseph, who had been a stupefied spectator of the swift drama—a few amazing hours had done it all—suddenly awoke to a clear vision of his own duty. In that moment of flash, all his hesitations and his petty doubts were sloughed off him, like the skin of a snake. In later days he must have wondered at his confident immediacy—this man once "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" but now as direct and purposeful as a soldier bred to action.

He turned from the scene and went "boldly" to Pilate. I imagine it was the first *bold* act he ever did. But a flash of loyalty like this changes even a man's nature. From the Procurator he asked for the right to bury the body of Jesus. What Pilate thought of the astonishing request of this well-known member of Council, no one knows. But it must have been not the least of the many surprises that faced Pilate during these portentous hours of that swift day—a member of the Sanhedrin that impeached Jesus demanding his body for honourable burial!

In the end, the Governor wrote the order, giving him the right of the dead body of Jesus. Joseph at once found his friend Nicodemus, and together, shocked at last into reality, they made hurried preparations for their bold venture. Nicodemus—out in the daylight at last—went quickly to a dealer and bought rare ointments and spices, and came back to meet his friend who had promised to procure fine linen as for the "honoured dead." Let us note that in the assured mind of their new faith, there was nothing too precious or too costly for the honour of this beaten and discredited Messiah.

Together, with their rich purchases—perhaps enlisting their own servants to aid them—they pressed through the crowd to the group of soldiers who were lowering the bodies from their crosses, and demanded the dead Jesus on the written order of Pilate. Under the eye of the observing world, who knew them as men of mark, they carried the Lord's body reverently away. Then, crowning touch of all, they laid him in the newly-hewn tomb of Joseph, wherein never man lay. We know little of that tomb except this—that Joseph had planned it for his own last resting-place! But even this, so dear to his Jewish heart, he gladly surrendered for the Lord whom everybody had forsaken. Then, with the aid of the servants, they rolled the unwieldy stone to the mouth of the tomb, and turned away in sorrow.

It is the courage of two cowards. It is a faith that sprang alive just where other faiths died!

V

Some people, while admitting the beauty of their deed, make two reservations.

On the one hand, they discount their conduct by remarking that they were brave too late! Jesus went to his cross without the support and friendship that might have brought joy to his heart. On the other hand, it is urged that their bravery was more apparent than real. Now that Jesus was crucified, there was no danger from the leaders and priests, who cared little what happened to a dead body. So long as this upstart Messiah was "down and out," it mattered nothing to them who befriended his corpse. Therefore, Joseph and Nicodemus, true to their canny past, were running no real danger either of hatred or ostracism. They would be considered only queer people: and men would smile at them rather than outlaw them.

The first slur has been answered already. We cannot blame any man for acting according to light and conscience. Up to Christ's death, Joseph and Nicodemus were intellectually unconvinced. It was the dying majesty of Jesus that influenced them, as it influenced the Roman centurion. As soon as they saw the truth, they were brave and immediate in following it.

Regarding the second slur, there is only one thing to be said—*it is not true.* There might have been real credit in following Jesus when he was a big force, stirring the advanced thought of his day; but there was nothing but contempt and disgrace in being identified with a crucified man, whose placard "The King of the Jews" sent a titter round Jerusalem. We fail to realise just how effectively *crucifixion,* that Jewish anathema, drowned Christ's ministry in ridicule and contempt. No one but a fool would have anything to do with a crucified man. Let us remember that even the disciples felt this: for it was only when they knew he was *risen* that they rallied again. Crucifixion, in itself, was not only death, but shame!

With this said, let us estimate the courage of these cowards.

To my mind, when they stepped out of the shadows, they did a far bigger thing than we commonly imagine. How great their new loyalty was may be best considered by comparing their conduct with Christ's professed disciples.

In the first place, when the disciples joined Jesus, most of them had little or nothing to lose. There was no real sacrifice involved in their adventure. Matthew, it may be, lost a precarious source of income, but he also lost the shame of his trade. Even in the event of Christ's failure, all of them could return to their home and business—as they were actually preparing to do after his death—and could take up their work where they had dropped it. But our two cowards had everything thrown in the scales —social influence, position, membership of the

Sanhedrin, intellectual difficulties, religious privileges, and their life-long friendship with the Priests and Pharisees. If these things made it hard for them to join Christ in his active ministry, at least they frankly threw them aside when they risked everything for him at the end. Their decision, when it came, was red with sacrifice.

Further, the disciples joined Jesus at the top of his success when all the curious world ran gaping after him. At that time, in his early popularity, our Lord had actually to "weed out" his disciples, choosing seventy, and afterwards confirming twelve as Apostles. Men were offering service unthinkingly, so that the Master had either to discourage or sift their application. He turned them back in numbers, either pointing them to more pressing duties or revealing the essential hardships and sacrifice of discipleship. But Joseph and Nicodemus, on the other hand, threw in their lot with him at the very ebb of his defeat, when the world laughed at him as a discredited prophet or a defeated upstart. They took part with him at a moment when they ran the danger of the scorn of the world, and the hate and prejudice of the triumphant priests.

The others followed Jesus in his life, and forsook him in his death. Even the crowing Peter, who vaunted his own courage, denied him with blasphemy, and fled from his side. But these men, who during his life came to him in stealth by night, stepped out of the shadows in which they had previously lurked, and stood nobly by him amid the blaze of a ruinous notoriety.

The others, we read, stood discreetly afar off, during the crucifixion itself, "*for fear of the Jews.*" Our two men, on the other hand, kept their distance from him during his popular ministry for the same reason, "*for fear of the Jews.*" But amid the opprobrium and desolation of his last loneliness, they were his only friends. They took their stand, I am glad to think, in his scandal and shame and defeat, when there was nothing to gain and all to lose.

Would that the world were full of such splendid cowards!

VI

There is a verisimilitude in this story that defies all hostile criticism. Such a sorry incident is the last kind of tale that people would forge about Jesus. It is impossible to imagine that the disciples would ever have invented such a discreditable tale about themselves—that at the end, after their three years' companionship, and especially after their loud protestations of fidelity, they all forsook him and fled. Peter, John, James, and Andrew!—that they left him to the chance mercy of some strangers, who saved him from a pauper's burial! It would be unbelievable, were it not true.

I am always freshly amazed at the ironic honesty of the Scriptures. How these twelve disciples would have wished, in later days, that this story were not true, and they could tell a different tale of loyalty and love!

So the heroes became cowards, and the cowards heroes. In spite of the slur that is commonly cast on them, these two men are among the saints of the New Testament. I cannot but think that their early timidity was not mainly social or physical, but intellectual. It was much harder for a Pharisee to follow Jesus than for anybody else. For if his teaching meant anything, it meant that the whole system on which the Pharisees founded their life was challenged. How readily can an honest man to-day understand their dubieties and hesitations! But in the end, (gloriously in the end), Joseph and Nicodemus, Pharisees and Rulers, amid defeat, dishonour, scorn, and shame did the big thing, the superb thing, when all the Peters and Johns who had protested their love were scattered like chaff.

But it is only what one would expect of such patrician souls when the light dawned at last in their hearts.

A RECONSIDERATION OF ANANIAS

Ananias has the doubtful honour of being one of a very select few whose names are now an integral part of English literature. In that little gallery of people whose names are household words, he occupies his own particular niche of dishonour. Indeed "Ananias" is no longer merely a name, but an *idea,* expressing a popular judgment, a charge, or a condemnation. I am not sure whether it is a libellous or actionable matter to describe anyone as "an Ananias"; but the appellation has certainly this virtue that every one understands perfectly what is meant! For the word is now as much a synonym for a liar, as Judas is for a traitor, or Cain for a murderer.

It is a pitiful thing that great sinners should not only ruin themselves but also their honoured and beautiful names! Before the traitor killed the name of Judas, it was as lovely and worthy as any in Hebrew history. Many a Jewish mother proudly gave that name to her baby, and crooned it afterwards in love. Kings, high priests, councillors, and commanders had been proud to bear it. Indeed, it was so common and so honourable that two of Christ's Disciples —two out of twelve—were named thus. In the little home at Nazareth, moreover, one of the brothers of Jesus was called Judas. But the great name is now dead, ruined, dishonoured, a broken thing.

The same is true of Ananias. This was not only a lovely name—it is very euphonious in itself—but it was held in the highest honour as one of the great names of Hebrew life. For instance, it was to a man called Ananias, a Christian saint and master, to whom Paul was sent after his conversion to be trained and instructed in the new faith. But the name is now only an insult! In fact, it is merely a euphemism for a liar and a hypocrite.

. . . . . .

I have always felt a deep pity and sorrow for Ananias. As a young lad I used to puzzle over his very dramatic story, wishing, if I may confess it, that it were only drama, and nothing more. The punishment, if punishment it be, seemed to me to be out of any proportion to the offence itself. Although the Apostle Peter had always been one of my heroes—how he wins a boy's affection!—I could not help feeling that in this instance he appeared needlessly harsh, and in the special circumstances, somewhat self-righteous. I heard people speak, with such easy contempt and condemnation, of this man Ananias, and sneer at the hypocrisy of his acted lie. But all the time, with a boy's nervous introspection, I only felt dreadfully afraid: for I knew that if all the lies in the world were punished like this, there would be few of us left in the world to punish!

But in spite of my boyish whim, the main facts of this incident—however we interpret them—are only too true. This story, I need hardly say, is not the kind of tale that the early Christians would invent or embellish about their young eager Church. People do not forge wicked or discreditable stories about themselves or the great institutions they love. This incident throws too big a slur on the quality of some of the early professing Christians, and it comes into the narrative with too great a jar amid the warmth and harmony of their happy relations to be anything else than historical! Even if it were told (as no doubt it is) to explain how the first Christian experiment in Communism was wrecked, yet unless it were founded on fact, it is in no sense the type of tale that the early enthusiastic Christians would tell about their own professing members. The fact that it is narrated here, right in the middle of their idealistic experiment,—and that without any special moral comment,—is only proof that our records are both honest and reliable.

I

The story is an outcome of a daring experiment of the early Church in social economics. That experiment represents history's most glorious "adventure in God," and its equally glorious, if somewhat tragic, adventure in human nature. In spite of its failure, the thoughts of every reformer and idealist have turned back wistfully to it for centuries. It promised so much of the stuff of our dreams! Even in its defeat, it represents man's most beautiful compliment to his own soul. Some say that the early Church believed more in God than we do. I think it also believed more in *man*!

In their love for Christ, in their love for each other, and especially in their love for the poor, the Christian brethren in Jerusalem agreed to have everything in common. We read that people who owned private property sold their possessions in the open market, and put the proceeds into a common pool to be administered by the Apostles for the good of all.

There is no doubt of the high dream in the heart of this experiment. It was one of the most beautiful attempts to solve the outrageous inequalities of life that so often baffle us, and to apply the teaching of Jesus to the problems of social duty. It argued, moreover, a delicate and sensitive thoughtfulness for the poor and the unfortunate that has never been equalled, far less bettered. It represented, in fact, the world's first, and perhaps greatest, experiment in social brotherhood.

We know how grievously the venture failed in the end, dying within a few years. It failed, perhaps, because of people like Ananias. It failed, no doubt, because human nature, even Christian human nature, is so pitiably weak and selfish. The dream was too high and the flesh was too weak. Greed and hypocrisy strangled this first attempt at Communism, as they have strangled so many other beautiful ideals in the history of man.

The failure of this "splendid dream" of the early Church leads me to make a relevant observation. When I am asked, as I have frequently been asked, why the Christian Church is not ready to back up the fine dreams of modern Communism by its active support, my answer lies in this story. People seem to forget that the Church has already tried Communism, was indeed the first to try it! And the experiment failed, though it was fostered under ideal conditions, in an ideal spirit, and among ideal people. It failed because men themselves, even the best Christian men, fail. No Communism that is not perfectly idealistic is worth trying; and if it is perfectly idealistic, it will not work, unless perhaps among saints! And even then, as in the early Church, it may easily fail. To give Communism a fair chance, everybody would need to be "sincerely converted." That is why I think we shall never see a true Communism till we reach Heaven! But I have no doubt, also, that we shall see it there.

The story suggests a second comment. Many of the people or nations in our generation who advocate Communism *deliberately dissociate their ideals from religion.* They either cut out religion from their programme, or actually regard it as an enemy. But in all honesty, religion (and a *perfect* religion at that) is the only conceivable means by which this social dream could be made to work! The first Communism in history was defeated simply by worldliness; and it is only real "other-worldliness" that could possibly make such an idealistic system either feasible or manageable. It is only the love and sacrifice of a perfect religion that can purify its motives and inspire its practice.

Meanwhile it seems to me an irony that so many professed Communists are openly irreligious. Their "irreligion" would be the first thing to defeat their own dreams. To be a Communist and *not* a Christian amounts almost to a contradiction in terms. There is little hope for any true and effective practical Communism *except among true saints*! That this should be so is at once its glory and its weakness.

II

This experiment in the early Church was entirely voluntary both in its spirit and its execution. So far as we can gather, there was no compulsion of any sort to induce a Christian to join it, and no shame for him in remaining outside. Its motives were equally honourable and beautiful—love for Jesus, and the ideal of equality that all men found in Him. The sketch which the New Testament gives us of this experiment is naturally very condensed, but we have sufficient information to guess how wonderful it was. We are told that the Christian people were so beautifully Christian and so full of mutual love, that they agreed to have nothing private or personal, but to throw their effects into a common pool for the good of the whole Church, and especially for the good of the poor and deserving. This, I need hardly say, was a great testimony to the Gospel of Jesus, and almost as great a testimony to their own personal faith.

For instance, a man like Barnabas—but what else would one expect of a big soul like Barnabas?—sold a piece of property, and came forward and laid the money at the Apostles' feet. I wish we knew more about Barnabas. He was one of the great Christian gentlemen of the Church. He was so generous, not only in money, (that is fairly easy), but also in his judgments and criticisms (and that is often hard). We remember how generous he was in judging young John Mark, when even Paul was like chilled steel.

It may be that Barnabas set the ball rolling. In any case, it did roll. Other people who had things to sell—a field, a farm, a property, or a piece of furniture—disposed of them in the open market and brought the money to the Apostles, who jointly administered the fund. We read, in consequence, that there was great joy and wonderful happiness in that ideal community. The spiritual joy in their hearts transfused even the most material things: "They did eat their food with gladness." Well might there be this singing happiness, with elders, deacons, and members like that!

There is no doubt that the case of Ananias is narrated as one of the main reasons why this amazing social experiment crashed. His act represented the inbreak of worldliness and selfish principles into this ideal society of other-worldly outlook. Such a voluntary system could only exist and flourish amid the perfect honour and fidelity of its members. Quite evidently, therefore, this sordid story is told as a historical explanation of the wreck of their dream.

III

While the incident is plainly told for this purpose in the New Testament, we must in fairness consider Ananias and his case strictly on their own merits. To do him justice we must even go the length of forgetting *why* the story was told! This is the only way in which we can lift the case out of the realm of prejudice and fore-judgment. That it was told to explain why a certain system failed has no real bearing on its own moral and spiritual issues.

We read that there was in the Church at Jerusalem a certain Christian member called Ananias. Apparently he was of some small social prominence and influence: for in that early Christian society, where so many were poor and needy, he was an owner of property. Of his real goodness and his kind intention there can be no doubt. He had it in his heart to do a big thing, for which, as we have seen, there was neither constraint nor compulsion! There were many other people who did not join in this voluntary communistic plan. We must acquit him, therefore, of any niggardliness of spirit, or of being what is called in Scotland "near." In any case, we know that if Ananias had done nothing with his property, he would have been in quite good company. Peter himself, in his own unmistakable words to the man, assures us of the entire voluntariness of any gift. "When it remained unsold, did it not remain your own. And even after the sale, was the money not yours to do as you pleased with it?" (Moffatt).

Let us do Ananias every credit then for his good intention and his equally good deed. We read that he talked the matter over with his wife, and they agreed to sell a piece of property which they possessed, and make contribution to this common fund for the relief of the poor. This was a proposal that did full honour to their love and Christian charity. If he was a poor man, as so many of the early Christians were, it may have been the only bit of land he possessed.

He sold the property. Between them, for their own needs and purposes, of which we know nothing, he and his wife agreed to retain a small part of the proceeds. (Every commentator agrees that, in the circumstances, it must have been a very small part of the proceeds.) Meanwhile, let us be quite clear on one point—*there was nothing whatever wrong with his decision to retain a part of the money*. He was open to give all, a part, or nothing. The money was his own, and he was free to use it as he cared. It is all to the man's credit that he effected the sale, and was more than ready to make such a generous contribution to the common needs.

In considering his act, therefore, let us remember the following facts clearly, which I tabulate at this point, even at the danger of repetition, to enable us to understand the situation: (1) There was no compulsion in this Christian experiment (except the infection of example) to lead any member of the community to part with his private property. (2) Any contribution that was made was in every case a spontaneous offering of love. (3) We do not read that any man parted with the *whole* of his property and left himself at the mercy of other people's charity. (4) There was nothing wrong with any man *reserving* a part of the price for his own use, after the sale had been effected. (Ananias's sin was not that he reserved a part of the money, but that he pretended he had not.) (5) Barnabas sold a property he possessed, presumably in Palestine. But Barnabas was a man of Cyprus, where his home was, and where he afterwards returned; and it is nowhere said or inferred that Barnabas sold all the worldly goods he had. (6) Many people, therefore, in different ways "reserved" their goods and money, and did not give all. Mere reservation of the money has nothing whatever to do with Ananias's guilt.

The main point to notice in favour of Ananias is that the record does not state, when he so generously laid his money at the Apostles' feet, that he asserted definitely that this was the entire price of his property! No doubt that is the common inference, and even a legitimate inference. But—inference apart—the record does not say that Ananias claimed that this was all. His fault, in my reading, was that he laid the money at the Apostles' feet and *said nothing about any reservation.* We can imagine the situation. "I have sold my little garden on Olivet, and I now give you the money for the poor." Sapphira his wife, poor fluttered woman, when she was cornered by Peter after the death of her husband, did certainly assert that their contribution represented the whole price. But it is very easy to understand her quick, definite lie, for she was openly challenged, before her own friends, with a leading question by Peter on the point. And one lie, alas, demands another to back it up! In the case of Ananias, however, the record simply states that he laid his contribution of money at the Apostles' feet, having privately retained a portion for their own use.

IV

The only sin I can see in the man's act is that he gave the impression, or allowed others to form the impression that this money represented the full price of the property. Now as we know, there was no call to give the "full price," for he might well have said, with frank honesty, "I am keeping a little back for our own private use." If he had said this openly, his gift might have been regarded as one of the finest in Christian history, for it would have been not only generous, but also honest and sensible. So many emotional gifts to the Church are not *sensible*!

Ideally, of course, his conduct was an acted lie. Even if it was not so in intention—which I think it was—it appeared so in effect. The general interpretation (without any ground except a preacher's imagination) asserts that he wished either to vie with others, or to stand well with the Church and be thought unusually generous. He expected to earn some public reputation for whole-hearted generosity which he did not deserve. It was an instance of human vanity that was unwilling to pay the price.

Others, somewhat basely, accuse him of a more unworthy motive. They assert that he gave this small contribution to the general funds, in the hope of drawing more out, when future payments were made—a kind of canny investment or "old age pension"! The Bible, however, in its usual fairness, gives us facts, without motives. Need we therefore impute them—especially of this scandalous order?

Others assert that his act was a subtle disbelief in the future of Christianity. He was not sure how long this new religion would last! So he cautiously reserved some part of his money for future emergencies, when the bubble burst. Apart from the slur thus thrown not only on Ananias but on the ideas of the early Church, to say this is to confuse the issues. Ananias may well have questioned *the future of Communism* without questioning in any way the future of Christianity! And perhaps the more sagacious a Christian was, the less would he believe that this extravagant experiment could last. We have a distinction here with a real difference.

The catastrophe that so quickly followed the man's pitiful deceit depends largely, in my view, on *the character of Peter*. The quality of a judge may often affect the quality of the act that is judged and certainly its punishment. I cannot help thinking that the actual *dénouement* of disaster is mainly the outcome of Peter's special temperament of transparent honour and candour, and his strong moral indignation.

In the first place, I should like to state my own conviction that Peter would have been a bigger and better Christian if he had quietly accepted the man's gift for the needy poor, and thanked him for the real generosity that had prompted his heart. If he felt need to reprove him for his petty deceit, might he not have done it to better purpose in private? Why need there have been this rather cruel public exposure, which in my mind produced the final disaster? Since, on his own showing, the gift was entirely freewill, and there was no constraint to give *all,* Peter might have been gracious enough and courteous enough to have thanked the giver for his charity. If it was for *the man's soul* he was mainly concerned, and not for a public demonstration to influence others—and I cannot believe that about Peter—there were so many other kindly ways of doing it. But instead, in his own candour and impetuosity, he opened out the vials of his moral wrath in public passion.

At this point we are forced to make a reflection—facts compel it. Let us think for a moment of this righteous Peter with his whirling words. Who was he, really, to call Ananias a liar? Was his own record so spotlessly clean? Not so long ago, in that same city, in a public court-room, when a chance kitchen-maid asked him if he too were a friend of Jesus, he had sworn, not once but thrice, with oaths and cursing, in perjured passion: "I tell you, woman, I know not the man." Yet it is this same sinning Peter, himself so lately in the dust and himself so lately forgiven, who now roundly accuses Ananias of a petty lie. The thought of these two men, guilty of a common sin, facing each other in this scene, imparts to it a bitter flavour of the ironic. How easily one might remark that if Ananias told a lie, Peter at least was a fine judge of a lie! He is the last man I can think of who had a right to twit this foolish soul.

I do not say this to lay any unneeded censure on Peter. Surely we can love and honour the impetuous Apostle without being blind to his obvious and admitted faults, so openly laid bare in the frankness of the New Testament. Indeed, we need not try to shelter Peter from just criticism, for—and this is his glory—he is that rare and lovable soul whose very mistakes endear him to his Christian brethren. Speaking personally, I owe more to him than to any of the twelve Disciples. He has been the more inspiring to me in my own temptations, just because of that blundering humanity of his so devotedly consecrated in Christian service!

On the other hand, I do not say this to condone the act of Ananias. Not one of us wishes to condone deceit, spoken or acted. But I am not so sure that the deceit was as black as we commonly paint it. Some of its apparent blackness is undoubtedly derived from the unexpected passion and the rash temperament of the man who judged it. That passion of Peter may well spring from the fact that we are all inclined to be unduly severe on the personal sins we have ourselves committed, regretted, and overcome—the sins of which we are desperately ashamed. Some of Peter's condemnation seems to me to have a faint echo of an old *self-condemnation*! If I were to be tried for a fault, and could choose my own judge, there is only one man I should definitely debar—anyone who has himself once committed and regretted the sin of which I am accused. That is why I shall always be sure of the fairness of Jesus. *He has no bias of a common sin to prejudice His judgment.*

If only Peter had not been presiding over the offering that morning! If he had been at the other end of Jerusalem conducting a service, and John, the gentle John, had been in charge of the money-box! I do not think that John, any less than Peter, would have let the sin of Ananias go unchallenged—but what a different way of challenging it he would have taken! The personal element colours this story so deeply. Peter's way is so much Peter's way, and John's way would have been John's way. I think he would have been more concerned for the man's soul than for his own anger, and he would have thought more of the sinner than the sin. But Peter —rough, honest, blunt, blundering Peter! I do not imagine that anyone has ever accused Peter of too much tact or gentleness.

V

Moreover, the Apostle's words should correct some of our extreme views regarding the guilt of Ananias. He admits that there was no suggestion of a "capital levy" or "conscription" in this matter. There is no idea, for instance, that Ananias is giving *less* than he should have given. Anything that he offered, therefore, was obviously out of his own good heart. *Should it not have been accepted as such?* That it was such a pitiful little lie is the last thing that Peter should have punished. Why did he take this high-handed attitude and lash this man with his unpruned anger?

I cannot help feeling—I say it with diffidence—that his *anger* was the one trait in his character that Peter never made perfectly Christian! How often he burst out upon people with spluttering indignation or mistimed vehemence! He broke out, once, upon Jesus, and took Him openly to task. He broke out upon John, the gentle Apostle, wondering audaciously what Jesus designed for that loved Disciple. He burst out upon Paul. He burst out upon poor benighted Simon Magus in a tumbling torrent of indignation. And here, he flashes out on Ananias with his vivid anger. In one sense, by his unpruned nature, Peter was always indignant. Sometimes, as we know, he was gloriously indignant: and there is no doubt that his vehemence was a source of power and leading in the early formative days of the Church. Yet I am forced to think that his impetuous anger was the one thing he never made wholly Christian!

The apologists for Peter—and I notice that every commentator is so definitely uneasy about this incident that he feels he must apologise for the Apostle—make some very extraordinary remarks on this story.

First of all, they infer, without reflecting what the inference implies, that Peter deliberately blasted this man with death and willed his end. All that one need remark is that the narrative says nothing of the kind! It states simply without comment: "Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the Ghost." It leaves us to do our own interpretation.

"Great fear" fell upon the Church, we are told; but surely that does not suggest great fear of Peter's power, which would be unworthy, but great fear of the amazing happening that had occurred. I think, therefore, that those have at least justice on their side who believe that the unexpected tornado of Peter's anger, (there, in the presence of all their common friends and companions), and the consciousness in the mind of Ananias of his own mean folly and shame were enough in themselves to act on a weak heart and produce the dramatic close. At least, there is nothing said in the records to make that interpretation impossible. And as for Sapphira, she had two astounding shocks to face—the exposure of her own sin, and the blasting news of her husband's death.

To think, on the other hand, that Peter willed this man's death would seem to me to be as much a condemnation of Peter as of Ananias. In spite of his prophetic words to Sapphira that the feet of them who had buried her husband were at her door, I refuse to defame the Apostle with the thought. Peter did not slay people for an exhibition! It would be unbelievable to me that the Disciple who lied so desperately about his Lord with oaths and cursing should have blasted another man for the very sin for which he himself was so gloriously forgiven. Whatever we say about this grim incident, let us preserve Peter's honour.

Further, it seems to me to be only a disguised kind of blasphemy to say, with Bengel, "At the beginning of that dispensation a *salutary example* was given in their case to many," or with Dr Lumby in his commentary on Acts: "Such sin, committed in spite of the light which they possessed, called for a special mark of Divine indignation." Who are we to express such views of God's motives? What conception of God is there in any man's heart who writes a sentence like that? If these ideas were true, then in the light of the love of Jesus Christ, the first thing one would need to do would be to *apologise for God*!

VI

All we know is that for his deceit Ananias paid that last dread price. Whether we regard the deed, in the common view, as by the decree of Peter or by the shock of his disastrous exposure, is for ourselves to choose.

The whole incident, in its origin at least, seems to me to be more a blunder than a tragedy—or rather, it was a sinful blunder of Ananias converted into a tragedy by the righteous blunder of Peter. How easily it might have been averted! On the one hand, if only Ananias had not preserved his hypocritical silence, and on the other hand, if Peter had restrained his just anger! Like so many of us, Ananias was an imperfect Christian, only with more to be said for him than for us, for he was only lately out of the fettering bonds of Jewish legalism. That legalism never taught its people to go to the "full limit of love"—indeed, a love without limit—but only to reach the minimum requirement! The sin of Ananias is really a "legalistic" sin, for he did what he thought to be a "measured duty," and wished thereby to take credit for love's full cup.

In the first intent, I have no doubt, he purposed to give the whole money. But thinking it over, perhaps wondering how long this rather foolish and extravagant Communism would last—and as I have remarked, the wiser a man was, the more would he wonder about this—he resolved to retain a small part of the proceeds for their own use. In this, if he had only been frank and open, there could have been no possible blame. If he had not remained silent in acted pretence but had stated openly, like an honest man, that he was reserving a small portion for his household use, we might have spoken to-day of the "*Honest St Ananias,*" and used his example as a needed correction for foolish and improvident giving! But he placed the money at the Apostles' feet, saying nothing. I suppose that is his sin—he said nothing! The sin does not lie in the reservation, but in the silence and the pretence. *An acted lie,* you say? Yes, but God grant that none of us ever do worse!

Then came Peter's temperamental anger. Dear impetuous Peter, with how many people have you blundered, from that time when you tried to take your Lord to task? I wish that there had not been that "repressed complex" in your heart about lying! For alas, a reformed man is always unduly severe on the sins that have tempted himself. We feel as if we were punishing ourselves when we punish others. So you opened out the too easy vials of your righteous wrath upon the wretched Ananias. You did it, too, before the whole throng of the Apostles and people. Why, Oh irate Peter? When Jesus dealt with you about your own similar sin, do you remember how delicately and tactfully He did it? "Feed my sheep, Peter," He said. None but you knew at the time the sweet wistfulness of His regret for your fall, and the delicacy of His restoration to your broken apostleship. But Ananias, poor silly sinner, his own conscience troubling him no doubt as he came, heard your tornado of exposure, as you laid bare his pitiable little sham before the judging eyes of his companions. And as the Scripture says, in its economy of comment, "he fell down and gave up the Ghost."

This is not divine punishment, unless it be that God uses for His own ends the subtle punishment of a man's own conscience. But I cannot help asking if his sin was so desperate—that sin of silence, even that sin of pretence—that my beloved Peter need have lashed him before the whole congregation of his friends, and exposed him to the withering blast of public contempt? I return in finishing to my own boyhood's fear that if all the shams and the acted lies and the subtle hypocrisies of the Christian world were flogged like this, there would be few of us left without tingling backs.

THE CASE FOR DEMAS

WAS Demas a deserter? Was he worse, was he a renegade? He forsook Paul: did he forsake Jesus? He deserted his friend: did he desert his religion? Did he lapse, after some glorious years of conflict and service, into pagan ease and security? Yes or No?

There is no doubt what the world's answer has been. "*Guilty upon the major charge*" is the universal verdict of Christendom. Yet I am not sure if that judgment would stand the test of impartial scrutiny. If a retrial of Demas were ordered in the court of history, I can imagine counsel for the defence stating his case before a hypothetical jury of historians in some such form as this:—

I

As I address myself to this case, I find it hard to say which has amazed me most—the slightness of the evidence, the unanimity of the verdict of history, or the severity of the judgment pronounced. The case has gone by default: there has been no appearance for the accused. Nobody seems to have doubted that he became a renegade. His traditional title is *Demas the Apostate.*

A few stray souls, with wistful concern, have speculated regarding his possible return to faith—much in the same gracious way as many have wondered whether the Rich Young Ruler was ever led to accept Jesus and his high demands. But even these good souls, with all their charity, have never questioned that he *was* an apostate, and that he *did* forsake the Christian religion! His lapse is universally assumed. So much has this been the case that one late manuscript quotes an unknown writer as saying: "*And there, at Thessalonica, Demas became an idolatrous priest*"; but I am glad that the author himself has the grace to add, "*of which I have read nowhere else.*"

One thing, at least, ought to be certain in our minds. The idle speculations of the Christians of the third and fourth centuries regarding people like Demas, who lived generations before them, are worse than useless. We readily discover, unfortunately, that their judgments are not only groundless, but often foolishly cruel. Persecution had so sharpened their own faith that they were needlessly bitter against any who appeared weak or recreant. To them, even the appearance of cowardice was the last sin.

In point of fact, there is nothing historical known about the lapse of Demas beyond that one cryptic sentence of Paul—which I need hardly say is capable of varied interpretations—"*For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.*" With so little to go upon, people might have the grace to admit that little can be discovered, and less can be proved. Yet, as if it were beyond all doubt, men accuse him of apostasy.

Thus in spite of the absence of any positive evidence, the later traditions of the Church have united in voting Demas a renegade. The implication is that he lost his enthusiasm, wearied of the exacting Christian code, returned to the lure of pagan ease and security, and became, like all shamed perverts, an aggressive enemy of the faith—some even say, profligate.

> "Just for a handful of silver he left us,
> Just for a riband to stick in his coat."

Thus, the picture of Demas hangs beside that of Judas, apostate with traitor, in the world's gallery of rogues.

II

The reasons commonly given for his apostasy may be briefly stated.

It is hinted that he shrank from the coming persecution already on the horizon, and winced before those sure trials of which Paul's imprisonment was a foretaste. He feared the hardships and dangers that the adventurous Christian life of the age entailed. Other accounts assert that, "loving this present world," he wearied of sacrifice and Christian restraints, longing perhaps for the remembered fleshpots of Egypt. "This present world" gripped him, with its lure and its promise. So he cut his cable and sailed out, out of Paul's life and out of Christ's.

The case against him is generally darkened by our memory of Paul's loneliness in prison where he awaited his trial for death. This is an inconsequent appeal to sympathy that seldom fails to influence a jury, even against its desire to do fairly. A clever advocate plays adroitly round that lonely figure of the old comrade and teacher amid his prison restraints, and awakens a scorn against the ungrateful and cowardly friend who left him derelict.

This general belief in the lapse of Demas is finally condensed in John Bunyan's famous picture in the *Pilgrim's Progress.* We recall that vivid scene of Demas standing "gentlemanlike" beside his Silver Mine, trying to seduce unwary pilgrims from the good road. I cannot help thinking that this representation of Demas as tout for a silver mine is one of Bunyan's few failures. It is too crude: it is not subtle enough: it is caricature. Whatever happened, we may be sure that Demas did not fall for mere silver and gold. If, with his faith broken, it was money or fortune he sought, would he ever have returned to penniless Macedonia? He would certainly have stayed in Rome, the magnet city, to which every adventurer came to make his fortune. If he had ceased to be a Christian, what did it matter where he was? He was not only safer in Rome, but also more sure of fortune. Bunyan's crude picture of the silver mine is good enough for his allegory, but not good enough for truth.

Thus we are faced at the outset with an unvarying tradition of this man's apostasy, accepted without question, but, I believe, without evidence. My claim is twofold. On the other hand, I believe that the tradition is completely untrustworthy and is a later growth of curious speculation; and on the other hand, I assert that the evidence does not warrant the verdict. I do not ask a full and unqualified acquittal on the major charge of apostasy, for I hold that this cannot be decided by us definitely in either way. But I do claim at least the time-honoured Scots verdict of "*Not Proven,*" without any of the unavoidable slur, however, that so often clings to that dubious decision.

III

Before stating the case for the defence, let us first of all examine the case for the prosecution.

1. Demas has been condemned on the word of one man alone, and that in a very sweeping and ambiguous statement.

Although that man was Paul, whom we admire and reverence, yet Paul was not infallible, especially in his estimates of men and their motives. This same witness had once condemned young John Mark, in far less doubtful terms, and had bluntly refused to have any further concern with him. Barnabas, that great soul, who knew John Mark better and more intimately than Paul, had fully guaranteed the young man's honour and character; but Paul, in his own sure if not even over-sure manner, had brushed them both aside with some disdain. Yet Paul lived to repent his action, receive Mark back into his trust and affection, and acknowledge his mistake, which to his own credit he did in generous terms. Thus it is fair to note that this single witness against Demas had made previous blunders of judgment, and had especially erred in the psychology of character! Even Paul's judgment of a man's motive is not final.

2. In his charge, Paul states two things—one, a *fact,* which every one accepts, that Demas left him and went to Thessalonica; the other, a *reason* for that fact, which may or may not be true. I may accept the fact without being in any way bound to

accept Paul's private and personal explanation of the fact.

Judged as evidence, his appended reason would be ruled out as incompetent in any properly conducted court. He volunteers a private reason for the departure of Demas, which may have been given in as much misunderstanding as marked his relations both with John Mark and the Apostle Peter at Antioch and Jerusalem. He actually accused Peter, as we know, either of duplicity or cowardice—"not walking uprightly." When a man has gravely blundered, twice at least to our knowledge, in estimating the *motives* of other people, the value of his conclusions may easily be questioned.

3. The whole case against Demas hinges on our private interpretation of a very vague and ambiguous phrase, "having loved this present world."

According to our bias, we may make this phrase mean much or little—something black and desperate, or something much less damaging and bitter. Even supposing that Paul's sweeping judgment of another man's secret heart is trustworthy, I only wish at the moment to point out that his remark is open to very varying interpretations, with which we shall deal in their own place. "Loving this present world," for instance, may only mean that a man is concerned with his personal safety, or it may mean that he has thrown over God and goodness. The phrase is too vague to be the ground of any precise charge.

IV

Let us come now to the statement of the case for the defence.

In the first place, let us look at the accused himself and examine him and his record.

What do we know of the man, and of his work and character?

1. We know from his name and his local connection that he was a *Gentile* and a *Greek*. In the end, when he left Paul, he went back to Thessalonica, which, as Chrysostom remarks, was evidently his home. Dr Lightfoot stresses two interesting points —(1) In Paul's letter, Demas is grouped with Aristarchus the Thessalonian; and (2) "Demetrius, of which Demas is a contracted form, occurs twice among the lists of politarchs of that city." Remember meanwhile the accused's Greek origin and temperament, a point which every scholar acknowledges.

2. We know, on Paul's own grateful testimony, that Demas had given a long and honourable Christian service. He is mentioned in three epistles written to different quarters: and the natural inference is that he and his work were favourably known in many cities. It is quite certain that he had travelled with the Apostle throughout Asia and Europe. Indeed, Paul calls him, equally with other noted men, "fellow-labourer," "co-worker." If he left the Apostle, therefore, it was not because some early spasm of raw enthusiasm had passed, or because he was untested, or because he was unaware of what an arduous Christian life entailed. He was a proved friend, a trusted and honoured worker, and an old campaigner. (The great Bengel, prince of expositors, believes that Demas was Paul's amanuensis.)

3. There can be no question of his sincerity and good character throughout these testing years. At the same time, there can be no question of his noted gifts. When he is mentioned in Paul's letters, he is always grouped with such incomparable men as St Luke and St Mark. He was quite evidently equal in respect and power with any one of them. He is, indeed, an honoured member of a noble company, with whom as a compeer he seems to be naturally grouped. It should certainly be remembered, therefore, that until he took this historic departure from Rome, there was not a breath of suspicion either of his sincerity or his loyalty: and until that incident, Paul always mentioned him gratefully among the true saints in his personal salutations. Whatever is said or denied, there is a fine record of work and character behind Demas.

V

With this stated, we come to the fact of his desertion. What may one say of this?

There are three possible interpretations of his act as I see it. It lies with us to say, in line with our knowledge of the man, which of these we think likely to be true.

The three possibilities are as follows. I put them in what seems to me the *inverse order* of their likelihood.

1. *He may have deserted his Lord.*

This, I need hardly remind you, is the common belief. But at the best, it is conjecture, unsupported by definite testimony. It is based, too—mark this—

on the worst interpretation of a very ambiguous phrase!

That phrase, "Having loved this present world," is the kind of unconditioned statement that an out-and-out man like Paul, with decisive views, might lightly use to describe what other men, just as good, might have described very differently. By the genius of his temperament, the Apostle saw most things in his own orbit as either black or white. There was little room, in his sharply-defined mind, for the graduated tones of colour (the greys and browns and russets) of which the world and human life are so full. To Paul, if a man were not white, he was black! He thought passionately and spoke passionately. In what seems to many to be a touch of religious hysteria, he called himself "the chief of sinners"—and meant it! There is no thought of insincerity in this, but there is undoubtedly the thought of *passion.* Thus, in judging a phrase like this, one has to remember the quality of the man who spoke it—in this case, a strong single-minded man who drew a chalk line through life, making everything on one side good, and everything on the other side evil. This was the quality of his mind, a great quality: but even the greatest quality has its natural defects.

Nowhere is this "intense" quality of the Apostle's mind more clearly seen than in his attitude to the Law of Moses. So convinced was he of the fullness and freedom of the grace of God in Christ Jesus that he gave the unintended impression to many, by his vigorous statements, that the law was hostile to grace and must be swept aside. Indeed, it is mainly on his strained opposition of these two things, grace and law, faith and works, and on his repudiation of the empty works of the law, that so many of the heresies of the Church have been founded. Some of the "lawless" creeds, and the later heresies that confused licence with liberty, were based on Paul's too vigorous opposition of the freedom of the Gospel and the narrowness of the law. He is not, of course, in any way the parent of these follies, for no one so recognised the place of the moral commandments in a true Christian life or honoured them as he did. But it is undoubted that the very excess of his advocacy of the liberty that is in the spirit of the Lord has led many unbalanced people into heretical follies. The fact that so many Christian teachers, since the days of the Epistle of James, have had to rebut the overstressed claims of "faith" and "liberty" is a proof that by the very genius of his temperament he made the opposition of the ideas too violent and radical. But this was the quality of his mind; and since he was fighting for priceless things, his overemphasis has been only for the church's gain. Still it befits us to notice the intense mind that can exaggerate so gloriously.

In this connection, I lately heard a somewhat ascetic Scots elder criticise a brother Christian who has a lovely home and keeps what we call a "good table." I could not help smiling when I heard him use this phrase of Paul: "I fear he loves this present world." A criticism like this can only be understood in the light of the man who makes it!

As against this ambiguous phrase of Paul, uttered by such as Paul, we must in fairness recall the good record and character of Demas. Could one who had been so "far ben" and such a proved advocate of the Lord, have fallen away in sudden collapse of life and faith? It is possible, but is it likely? I think Paul, who could on occasion be very definite, would have been definite here.

2. *It may have been a desertion of his work at Rome.*

This is more likely than the former.

But, in the first place, even if it were true, would it necessarily be blameworthy? Paul himself, when he was a free agent, seldom stayed long anywhere. Indeed, he had taught Demas and others to be birds of passage. Many cities both in Asia and Europe had implored the Apostle to stay with them for the kingdom's sake. But Paul had always moved on, taking his own firm lead. Migration was in the blood of the early preachers. The church's problem of evangelisation demanded it.

Further, the one thing that Paul did not have, that other men had, was a *home*. We admire him for the resolute break by which he had given up everything, even parents, social opportunities, professional prospects, and friends, for the sake of Christ. But happily, this radical break is not demanded of everyone. There are natural and even beautiful ties of home and kinship that may have been the most honourable reason for the departure of Demas from a city like Rome to his own home town. He had calls and longings of which Paul knew nothing, which Paul, indeed, in his own unusual situation, might readily misconstrue.

So far as we know definitely, Paul had no ties. Any ties he ever had, he had snapped. I am filled with awe at the resolute certainty of this amazing apostle. Home meant nothing to him, nor friends, nor interests, nor private ambitions, compared with the claims of the work to which he was committed.

But everybody is not built like this. Thank God for it; for without the gentler relations of home and friendship, this would be a cheerless world!

You will understand now why I asked you specially to remember that Demas was a Greek. The Greek temperament was something, I imagine, that Paul, by his religious and racial genius, could neither understand nor appreciate. He could not understand its æstheticisms, its hesitations and balancings, its artistic and sensitive soul, its dependence on ideal surroundings, its wistful appeals and longings, its good love of art beauty and music, its imaginative and speculative background, and its need of the sympathetic environment of love, home, and friendship. The ancient Greek mind was both a glory and a peril.

Once more, life in Rome must sometimes have been a horror to a sensitive Greek. That blatant city, with its materialistic and arrogant people, must have seemed, in certain moods, a kind of insolence. Many famous Greeks in the days of the Empire came to Rome to try the impossible—to teach the hard Roman some of their own generous culture! We know that many of them were unhappy and miserable. No Greek in ancient times was ever content until he reproduced, in Sicily or elsewhere, some of the typical life of his beloved cities. Perhaps that is why the punishment inflicted for political crimes on noble Greeks was always the same—*banishment!* That was life's hardest wrench to a true son of Hellas.

We may blame Demas for breaking violently from Rome and returning like a homing bird to Thessalonica. But we are dealing here with temperament, which, willy-nilly, is such a part of ourselves. His conduct may not seem to be of the "sternest stuff" of heroism. But are we all stern heroes? It takes many centuries for life to throw up another iron man like Paul.

The departure to Thessalonica need not necessarily mean any departure from faith, from loyalty to Christ, or even from work itself, active work elsewhere. Having himself no mental twilight or spiritual nuance, Paul might interpret his friend's act, in his own vigorous language, as "a love of this present world," in the sense that he was seeking his own personal safety and avoiding the perils of Rome. Perhaps to the Apostle (and prison always gives a man a strained outlook) the conduct of Demas may have seemed to be a desertion of duty and opportunity. Yet there was aggressive Christian work to be done in Thessalonica, work that was fully as difficult and perilous, harder too in some ways because done in his own native city and among the people who knew him. But Demas, with his Greek wistfulness, might do it better in the kindly atmosphere of home and love and friendship.

In any case, Paul's strong phrase, even if it does suggest that Demas was concerned for his own safety and was afraid to face persecution and death, does not necessarily imply a desertion of Christian work! All it might suggest is a desertion of *danger*.

3. *It may have been a desertion of Paul.*

This is, indeed, all that Paul's language suggests. In fact, it is all that it actually says. "Demas hath forsaken me and is departed unto Thessalonica." As such, it can be fairly construed as the natural expression of *keen personal disappointment*, justified or not.

If I may speak frankly, there are times when

I wonder how a speculative Greek like Demas "rubbed along" with Paul! The apostle was so sure. so convinced, so dominant, and at times so unyielding. He could not understand the honest dubieties, the wistful longings, the "heimweh" of a mind like Demas. Constant travel, together with constant change and new problems, may have helped to make the alliance of these incompatibles more bearable or their friction less noticeable. But the inaction and sameness of life in a Roman prison must have made the natural difference of their mind and temperament inevitably and perhaps intolerably acute.

Admire him as we may and as we must, we cannot help suspecting that Paul at times was a "difficult" man to live with and understand! We know that he had a real genius for friendship. The attraction of his personality must have been almost magnetic, for he had troops of friends, staunch and loyal. A great character such as his commands passionate adherence, as a born leader. But there were other types of mind, æsthetic and philosophical in the Greek training, who could never be so sure and decisive as he was, and must have found his quick certainties, his clear straight lines, and his sharp moral divisions a perpetual challenge to themselves.

Paul was so thorough and so "all or nothing." His religious passion was so vehement that it literally swept everything else out of his life. The danger with this type of tumultuous Christian is that many of the finer things of life are swept out with the trash. In their consuming passion for Christ, people of his order, but with less of his intellect, have again and again decried art, music, and science, and have thereby robbed life of many of its rarer reverences. When a man like this cries: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," it may be a sheer glory, as it was with him. On the other hand, it may often mean, not that Jesus claims and colours everything and thus makes *all living* religious, but rather that everything else that is not specifically religious and is called secular, is swept out on the flood! If we contrast with this Hebrew vehemence the typical Greek mind, with its delicate appreciations and its philosophical mysticism, we may well see how two good men, equally good but differently good, might be better apart. They represent incompatibles, two Christian men differently attuned to the same God, the same message, and the same world. If I may confess it, therefore, there are certain moods in which I can fully understand that Demas, under these unchanging prison conditions, felt the strain of unrelieved intimacy impossible, and believed separation to be the best way even to remain friends!

To cut the Gordian knot, (it may have been done in all gentleness), Demas may have deliberately thrown himself open to misunderstanding, and bluntly returned to Thessalonica. I can even conceive a fashion in which he may have been *heroic* in doing it. To run the risk of misunderstanding, without the chance of public defence before his friends and before the churches, is a fine species of courage.

. . . . . .

This then is Paul's charge, that Demas forsook him and departed to Thessalonica. I claim that all the charge means or need suggest is a *personal* separation, and that alone. The reason the apostle appends, being the man he was, may be discounted, and certainly need not infer the desperate conclusion that succeeding generations have drawn from it.

We may agree, if we will, that Demas is not of the stern stuff that makes a Paul, a Columba, a Father Damien, or a Livingstone. But there is room and need for the gentle stuff as well as the stern stuff in the Christian life. In any case, how many of these marvels does a generation throw up? If a missionary leaves Africa or India for home reasons or for the health of his wife, we do not generally call him a renegade! *Yet Demas may have done no more than he.*

I offer one final plea to withhold the worst judgment.

After the Apostle broke with John Mark, reckoning him a coward, what would our opinion have been of that young man, did we possess no later record of Paul's revised judgment? I am certain that he would now have been hung with others in our gallery of deserters! But fortunately, Paul had time to correct his early misapprehension and record his revision of his first hot criticism. With Demas, however, he had neither the time nor the opportunity; for if our calculations are true, the Apostle went shortly to his death. Meanwhile, in his famous ambiguous phrase, we have only the record of his first passionate sorrow. On the analogy of his mistaken criticism of Mark's motives, I ask at least for a suspension of the worst verdict.

Was Demas an apostate?

If I were myself a member of the jury, my vote would be given with all confidence, "Not Guilty."

Meanwhile, I ask only for the Scots decision "Not Proven." And in asking you to give it, I ask you also to rob it of any innuendo or slur.

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